the National Trust
for Scotland

a place for everyone

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The following is intended to provide responses to the most frequently asked questions we receive about the Trust and is by no means exhaustive. Inevitably a document like this is out of date the moment it is published and our aim is to refresh it every six months or so.

If there are any questions you have that are not covered in the following pages, please feel free to contact us by using the online form at **www.nts.org.uk/ContactUs** or by calling Customer Services on **0844 493 2100.**

An A to Z of Frequently Asked Questions

ACQUISITION OF NEW PROPERTIES

Q. Newspaper articles seemed to be suggesting that the Trust will be buying more properties – is this true?

A. We have no plans to take on new properties at this stage. As we make clear in our new strategy, Securing the Future of Our Past, our initial goal is to put funding in place for investment in our existing portfolio of properties. However, we think the Trust should retain the ambition in the future to obtain additional properties of great heritage significance for the benefit of the nation – if the conditions are right and sustainable funding arrangements are in place.

ADMISSION FEES AT TRUST PROPERTIES

Q. How much does it cost for a paying visitor to get into Trust properties?

A. See the table below for admission costs for 2012/13. Trust Members, of course, do not pay any admission fee.

BAND (2012/13)	ADULT	FAMILY	1 PARENT	CONCESSION
A	£15	£36	£28	£11
B	£11.50	£28	£21.50	£8.50
C	£9.50	£23	£17	£7
D	£6	£16	£11	£5
E	£3.50	£8.50	£6.50	£2.50
CULLODEN	£10	£24	£20	£7.50
RBBM	£8	£20	£16	£6

Q. Why are there different charges at different properties?

A. The charges reflect the differing scales and ranges of experiences and activities across our portfolio of properties. A property like Culzean offers an enormous country park alongside a complex of iconic buildings with a fascinating complement of valuable artefacts and interpretative materials (and at Culzean you can pay a lesser rate if you do not wish to visit any of the buildings), which will provide the basis of a whole day out. Other sites are smaller and more intimate. No charge is made at all to visit our countryside properties, such as Glencoe, although we respectfully point out that any donation is welcome to help us maintain these wild lands and provide the parking facilities and pathways necessary to ensure public access.

If you plan to visit properties regularly, it would be a much more cost-effective option to take out Membership of the Trust, which in turn also gives you free reciprocal entry to National Trust properties in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

ALLOTMENTS

Q. Is the Trust adopting a similar approach to the National Trust (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and making land available for allotments?

A. This idea is being encouraged for consideration across our various properties and by our estate management team as an option for 'fallow' ground. We have in place a new National Estates Manager, whose job it is to assess opportunities to make different uses of our property assets for the benefit of our conservation objectives.

Delivery of any solutions we agree upon is likely to be through third parties, however, as the process of setting up and managing an allotment is labour-intensive and produces little by way of an income. The lease of ground adjacent to the House of Dun in Angus is a good example of community partnership working whereby Trust land is put to productive, community allotment purposes.

ARDUAINE GARDEN

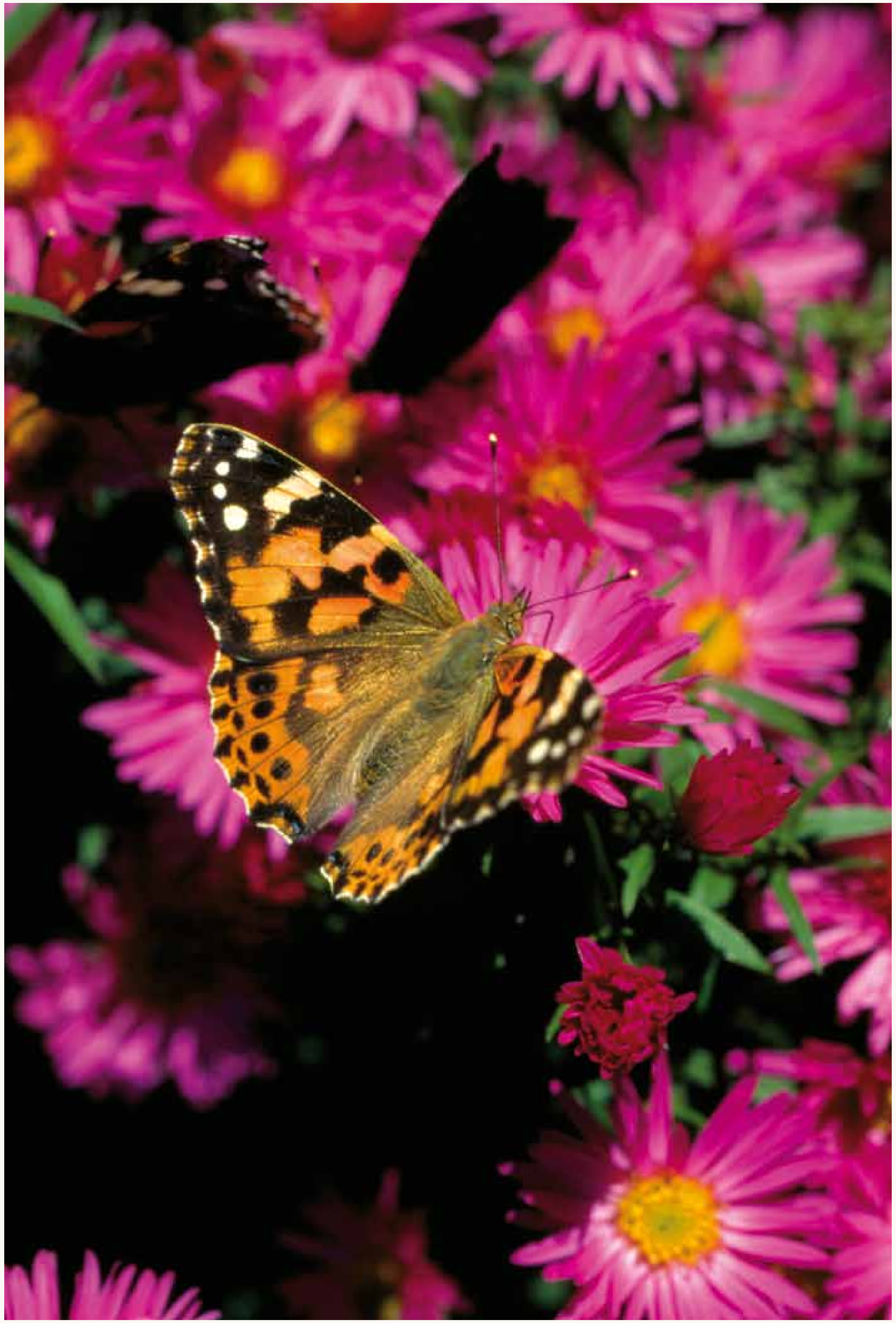
Q. How does the future look for Arduaine Garden?

A. The Trust's joint strategy with local community interests to secure the future of the garden has been highly successful. The property now has a stronger commercial footing with an enhanced retail offering, an events programme and a beneficial partnership with the adjacent Loch Melfort Hotel and the local community. Visitor numbers and membership conversion are up. Our campaign to fund-raise for Arduaine's endowment, launched in 2011 as 'The Secret Garden Appeal', has more than achieved our fund-raising target – taken together with pledges and support given previously, we have exceeded the £1 million we were seeking for the property's endowment. We can say with confidence that the garden is secure for the foreseeable future.

Q. What effect will the outbreak of Phytophthora ramorum (sudden oak death) at Arduaine have on the garden?

A. The outbreak has affected around 1,000 larch trees in the shelterbelt that protects the garden from westerly winds. As responsible landowners, we have no choice but to cut down these trees and dispose of them by means approved by the Scottish Government and Forestry Commission. In the short term we will have to undertake remedial measures to protect the garden, but in the longer term, as has been done with the garden over its long history, we will have to evolve towards different planting regimes to suit changing conditions – in this case a regime that is less vulnerable to these fungi.

However, this is very much a national problem – most probably exacerbated by climatic change driving us towards milder, much wetter winters and damp summers. The fact remains that the source of the spores which contaminated Arduaine is not known and that there are instances of outbreaks across the country. We are encouraging national agencies to consider the wider implications and to act accordingly.



BANNOCKBURN

Q. What work is underway to prepare Bannockburn for the 2014 anniversary?

A. Work is underway to develop interpretation and learning installations to go into a new state-of-the-art visitor centre – functions that are absolutely central to understanding the significance of this pivotal event in our history. The Scottish Government has pledged support to the tune of £5 million and the Heritage Lottery Fund has generously allocated a further £3.9 million. A design for the visitor centre has been selected and planning permission was granted based on its sympathetic and complementary positioning at the entrance to the battlefield. Along with our partners, Historic Scotland, we have commenced preparatory works and the project is set for completion in time for 2014.

Q. Some people find the opening of the new centre at Bannockburn to be a politically sensitive issue. Why has the Trust decided to pursue this project?

A. The Trust is not a party-political organisation and works with all elected representatives. There can be no denying the central importance of Bannockburn in shaping Scotland's history, nor the fact that 2014 is the 700th anniversary of the battle and that this occasion deserves to be marked. The Trust's main interest is to ensure that this significance is understood in its context – the interplay of international events and cultural mores which led up to the battle and what happened afterwards. That is why the focus of this project is on a visitor centre and the interpretative materials it will contain – after the opening ceremony is over, it is the centre that will endure to tell the story of Bannockburn. Those who have visited the site in recent times will recognise that there is a need to restore dignity to the battlefield and its monuments and to reaffirm the heritage significance of this place. The Trust will focus on historical fact and providing a unique visitor experience; it is for others to make wider interpretations and pronouncements.

Q. What will the new visitor centre bring to the site?

A. The current exhibits will be replaced with various forms of digital interpretation designed to transport visitors back to the fourteenth-century battle and explain its context and consequences.

The displays and exhibits will utilise state-of-the-art technology. We have commissioned award-winning architects, interpreters and digital designers to bring the battle to life. BrightWhite Ltd, with an international experience of creating visitor attractions including the Lofoten Aquarium in Norway, is designing the interpretation and exhibits. The team will work with the Centre for Digital Design and Visualisation – a commercial partnership between Historic Scotland and Glasgow School of Art's Digital Design Studio – to build an innovative digital exhibition that will give visitors a unique understanding of what it would have been like to be at Bannockburn 700 years ago.

Historic Scotland and the Digital Design Studio joined together to form the Centre for Digital Design and Visualisation to record World Heritage Sites and their partnership and experience will be applied to explaining the relevance of the topography of the site and how the tactics of the battle impacted on the outcome.

The existing visitor centre is tired, outdated and is unable to contain everything that needs to be included to do the interpretation of this iconic site justice. Award-winning architects Reich and Hall were appointed to design the new centre building, and landscape architects Andrew Wright commissioned to adapt the topography to one more representative of its historic design and purpose. The proposals for this have been carefully thought out to open up the views to the commemorative monuments and provide better visitor facilities than are currently available.

The new centre will have more catering facilities and better space for educational groups as well as the new exhibits and displays. Community groups will be encouraged to use the meeting spaces and the initial feedback to this has been hugely supportive.

The layout of the new centre will be better suited to accommodate coach parties with a dedicated entrance to allow them easier access, dedicated parking and more efficient ticketing for larger numbers.

Q. Why was this design adopted for the new visitor centre?

A. The entire concept of the visitor centre is that it serves and enhances what is a solemn site where momentous and violent events took place. The visitor centre itself is not the purpose of a visit to Bannockburn – what it will do is present context and information before people go out onto the field of battle so that they can make sense of what they are seeing.

For those reasons, the centre is designed in such a way to be visually unobtrusive and is sited so that the vista over the battlefield – towards the powerful monument of Robert Bruce on his charger, the fields beyond and Stirling Castle (the actual military objective of the battle) – is clear. The brick facing will be textured to represent the pattern of light on blackened chain mail.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Q. Who are the National Trust for Scotland's Trustees and how were they appointed?

A. A ballot of the National Trust for Scotland's members was launched on 5 January 2011 and closed on 2 February 2011, was conducted electronically and by post and drew 41,651 votes – representing over 13% of the total membership. The ballot was based on a range of candidates who put themselves forward for election.

As a result of the ballot outcomes, the following people were elected to serve as Trustees:

- Margaret Alexander
- Julian Birchall
- Jillian Carrick
- Sir Peter Erskine
- Keith Griffiths
- Nicholas Groves-Raines
- Robin Harper
- Amanda Herries
- Diana Murray
- Benjamin Tindall

Our governance arrangements allow a further three Trustees to be co-opted to join the Board in order to provide any additional, specialist skills and input required for the purposes of informed decision-making. Consequently, Professor Ian Percy and James Knox were invited to become Trustees.

The Chairman and President of the Board are traditionally appointed at the invitation of our Trustees, with Members attending our Annual General Meetings given the opportunity to endorse their appointments.

The current Chairman is Sir Kenneth Calman and our President is Richard, 10th Duke of Buccleuch and 12th Duke of Queensberry.

Background information on all Trustees is available on our website in the 'About the Trust' section.

Q. Why are all Trustees not elected?

A. As was recommended in the 2009/10 independent strategic review of the Trust (the 'Reid Review'), it is practice in most modern Boards of Governance to have the option of co-opting additional Trustees in order to provide additional, specialist skills – which is certainly what our two co-optees bring to the table. We have one remaining place for a co-optee and we will consider who might fill this as we begin to implement our new five-year strategy in earnest. It should be clear that elected Trustees form the much greater part of the Board, and this would be reflected in any matter that came to a vote.

Q. What terms of office do the elected Trustees serve from the date of their appointment?

A. 4.5 years – Nicholas Groves-Raines
4.5 years – Margaret Alexander
4.5 years – Jillian Carrick
4.5 years – Benjamin Tindall
3.5 years – Keith Griffiths
3.5 years – Robin Harper
3.5 years – Amanda Herries
2.5 years – Julian Birchall
2.5 years – Peter Erskine
2.5 years – Diana Murray

New Trustees elected to replace those who have completed their term will adopt the same term of office as their predecessor.

BEAULY – DENNY POWER LINE

Q. What is the Trust's position on the power line?

A. From the outset, the Trust opposed the proposals for the new, overland 400 kV electricity transmission line from Beauly (near Inverness) to Denny (near Stirling) due to its unacceptable impacts on landscapes and its flawed business case. As all the affected Local Authorities along the route objected, the proposals were considered at a Public Inquiry starting in 2007. The Trust was represented at the Public Inquiry as part of the Beauly–Denny Landscape Group (BDLG). The development has now been approved and construction works are underway, which is a matter of great regret for the Trust.

Full details of the Inquiry can be seen on the official Inquiry website at **www.beaulydenny.co.uk**

BURNS (ROBERT BURNS BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM)

Q. How is the RBBM performing?

A. Since opening to the public in December 2010 (as at end December 2011) the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum has welcomed 485,384 visitors against a target of 349,245. The museum is performing strongly in the current climate and its admission income has increased by 181% compared to the previous year. Between 1st March and end December 2011, catering sales increased by 38% and onsite retail income increased by 39% compared with the same period in the previous year.

The museum has also attracted a host of accolades and awards in its first 15 months of operation, including being selected as a finalist for the prestigious Art Fund prize (the only Scottish project to do so), securing a five-star rating from VisitScotland – not to mention being named as Horace Broon's 'new favourite place in Scotland'!

Q. Has the First Minister's pledge to ensure every Scottish schoolchild visits RBBM been made good?

A. The pledge was made at the official opening of the Museum in January 2011 and we are in contact with officials at the Scottish Government's Education Department as to how this will be taken forward. This will understandably be a major undertaking that has to be coordinated at national level. Nevertheless, in its first full year of operation, we have welcomed more than 7,000 children on school visits to the Museum, bringing the life, loves and works of the Bard to life for each of them.

CANNA

Q. What is the Trust trying to achieve on Canna and why is it important?

A. The islands were given to the Trust at the bequest of their previous owner, the Gaelic folklorist and scholar John Lorne Campbell, in 1981. Under the Trust's management they are run as a farming and conservation area. Canna House, one of two big houses on the island, contains John Campbell's important archives of Gaelic materials, which were donated to the nation along with the islands.

The Trust is dedicated to fulfilling John Campbell's wish that Canna continues to support a thriving community in the traditional Hebridean style and we have made great efforts to attract new families to live there.

Also, Canna's dramatic coastline is a Special Protection Area, home to large colonies of seabirds, including shags, puffins, razorbills and black guillemots.

Q. What is the Trust's policy on property tenure on Canna?

A. The Trust is looking at tenure in conjunction with the local community. One resident who chose to leave Canna suggested this was a factor in their decision to leave. However, the Canna Community Association stated:

'Land tenure is not an issue we wish to publicly battle over; we are committed to working with the NTS for a sustainable, stable and co-operative future. We support the NTS as our landlord and partners in the development of Canna. We, as a community, are building on self-empowerment through this partnership and do not share the views recently stated. We believe there are solutions to any security of tenure issues residents may have and, as stated in Canna's development plan, these will be worked through as the island continues to grow. Alexander Bennett, the NTS Group Manager, has recently reiterated that longer-term leases will be negotiated for and by residents – as this has always been the case. We have also welcomed the arrival of Stewart Connor as the NTS manager on Canna, and he has already made substantial, positive changes.'

We are exploring options that will enable us to be supportive of the community's aspirations yet ensure we meet the terms of the bequest of Canna to the Trust and our objective of conserving the island for the benefit of the nation.

Q. Is there really a future for Canna?

A. Yes. Despite the undoubted setback of a number of tenants choosing to leave, the long-term prospects are actually very exciting. We, along with our partners in the Canna Community Association (CCA), continue to work on providing bedrock for a sustainable future for Canna.

Last year we attracted over 9,000 visitors and Trust members to the island, including 200 – 300 who stayed at Tighard Guest House. We have invested heavily over the years in the infrastructure that makes life sustainable – housing, water, electricity schemes, roads, the pier, a new vehicle bridge to Sanday, holiday accommodation and events. Our holiday accommodation is fully booked and the island is established as a main sailing destination.

Additionally, there has been the completion and restoration of 'MacIssacs' – a family home for rental, a marketing tie-in through Cal-Mac, an increase in the number of cruise ships stopping at Canna, the opening of Canna House to the public, the almost complete restoration of Canna House's garden as a visitor attraction, the highly successful Canna Feis plus another event organised as a celebration of Gaelic poetry and a Gaelic learning programme for the community.

Furthermore, we are supporting the community in applications to Highland Council to establish a community shop, a bid to establish a community energy scheme, a guided walks programme for cruise ships, more new holiday accommodation and an application to Creative Scotland to fund the Feis for a further two years. It is encouraging to report that a second-stage community-led application we supported to the Village SOS Appeal to establish a Community Mooring Association (which will allow the community to manage, and profit from, moorings in Canna Bay) has been successful.

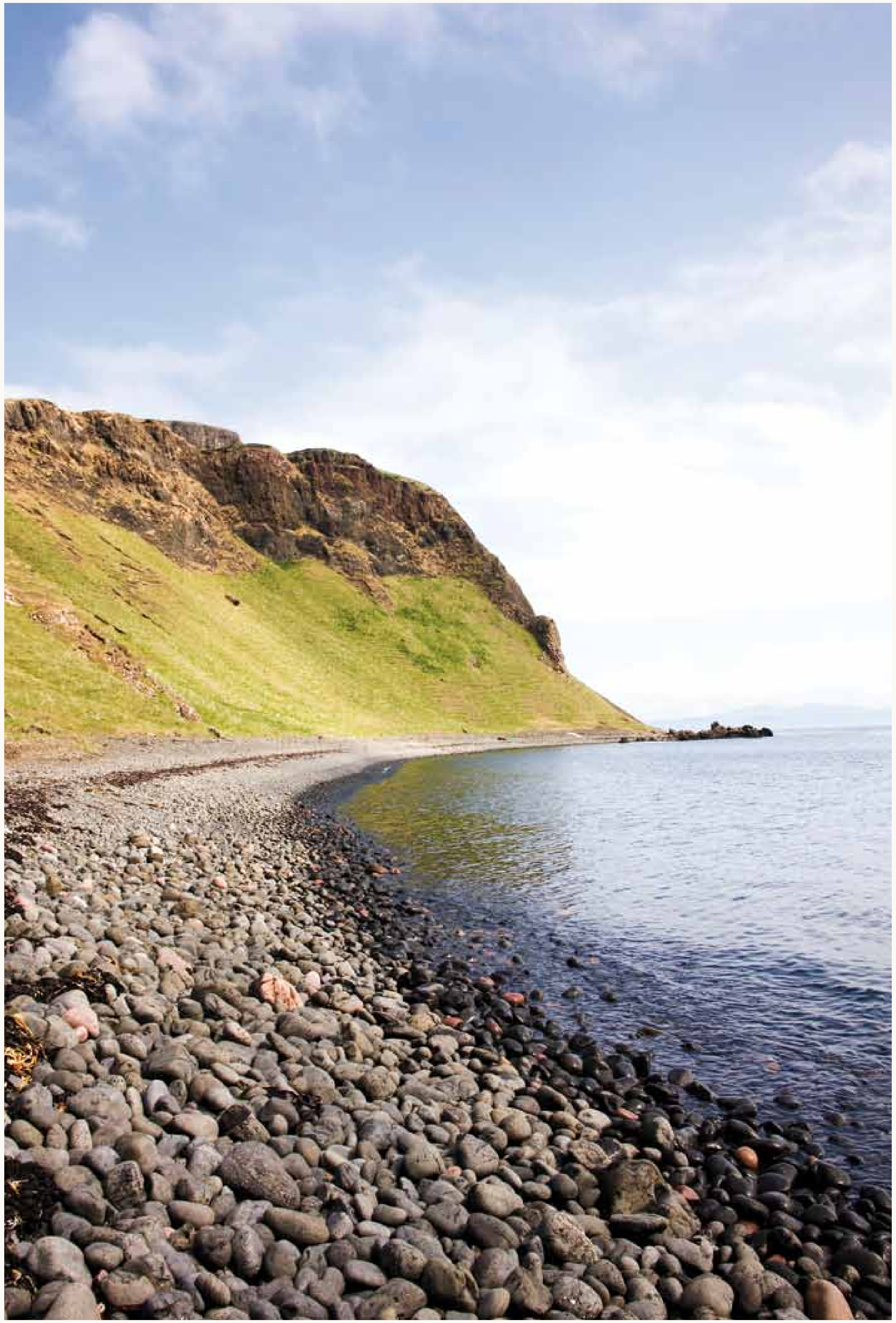
All of this marks a lot achieved in just one year, and credit lies with our manager on Canna as well as the CCA.

We should also add that, having advertised the tenancy to run the Tighard Guest House recently, we have already had many serious expressions of interest.

Q. What is happening with regard to St Edward's Chapel?

A. This is a difficult and sad situation that has not been of the National Trust for Scotland's making. Nevertheless, we are taking forward plans for the Chapel's eventual refurbishment.
Canna was gifted to the Trust in 1981 but the chapel did not come into our care until the 1990s. It was in very poor condition and the Hebridean Trust came forward with ambitious plans for fundraising and refurbishment that would allow the Chapel to function as accommodation for visitors to the adjacent Canna House and its collections.

Unfortunately, the works commissioned by the Hebridean Trust did not make the chapel wind or watertight resulting in ongoing deterioration that has made the building unusable for the time being.
We have watched on in some sadness as the various parties involved have failed to resolve their dispute and have had to step in directly to carry out urgent remedial works.
Our Property Manager on Canna, Stewart Connor, is taking the matter forward as a priority. We are confident that St Edward's Chapel will be made functional again and dialogue has begun with the residents of Canna to that end.



CATERING

Q. Where does s the Trust's catering produce come from?

A. We are always working to improve our range of local suppliers, and we encourage the use of Scottish brands first and foremost. We estimate that 95% of our suppliers are Scottish but we do have to cater for all budgets and Scottish produce can at times be more expensive. Furthermore, in the summer months we have high volume and sometimes small suppliers cannot meet the demand, price or consistency required. We do try to balance the use of national suppliers, where we can secure best value through economies of scale, with local suppliers.

We try to increase our buying power through national contracts, which also helps reduce carbon emissions through consolidation by reducing the number of deliveries and food miles. We also need assurance from suppliers of their food safety standards and hazard analysis and critical control – a major part of new food legislation – which is difficult for some small, local suppliers.

Use of local products/suppliers has been increased through our partnership with 3663, a wholesale food supplier. For example, Lazy Days and Ice Delight are two small Scottish businesses whose products 3663 now sell as a direct result of active encouragement by the Trust. We have also been working in partnership with Scottish Enterprise to pilot the promotion of more local Scottish produce at Kellie, Crathes and Pollok.

Q. Are there any plans to outsource catering facilities?

A. To date, each operation has been reviewed individually on a case-by-case basis with devolved decision-making. There are currently four catering operations leased to third parties. We anticipate a fundamental review in the 2012/13 financial year.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Q. What is the Trust's policy on combating climate change?

A. As a conservation charity we take climate change very seriously. Actions the Trust is taking to tackle climate change include:

- Exploring how we can make our buildings more energy efficient: Trust properties have some form of renewable energy installations, e.g. a housing project at Balmacara has recently been shortlisted for awards for its biomass and air-source heat pump installations. Many of our new visitor centres (Glencoe, Culloden and RBBM) incorporate the latest in low-energy materials and renewable technology, producing buildings that have low carbon footprints, thereby reducing their energy demands. Other examples include the recent refurbishment of the popular toilet facilities at Culzean Swan Pond where the installation of sun tubes reduces the need for artificial light, and grey-water technology has reduced the mains water demand by 80%
- Using local materials and suppliers for repairs and maintenance
- Empowering staff to make energy-efficient choices when travelling; for example we are about to provide staff with ready-reckoner tables to make it easier for them to compare costs and carbon in choosing their travel options. The Trust business mileage rate for passengers provides incentives for car sharing to essential car users. Some videoconferencing, home working and shared travel are already taking place. The Trust will shortly be implementing a Cycle to Work scheme to encourage further use of cycling by staff
- Our Rangers and Ecologists carry out a wide number of surveys on habitats and species which add to our knowledge of how climate change may be affecting our wildlife
- All Trust properties participate in the Green Awards Scheme, which requires an audit every two years. The scheme encourages energy-use reductions and sustainable transport.

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

Q. What is the Trust's strategy for improving the profitability of its commercial activity?

A. Our Commercial Strategy focuses on maximising the net contribution of all commercial activities so that income can be invested in our conservation efforts. Increased returns are being generated by improved procurement, offering the right product at the right time through the most efficient channels to the buyers. Efficiency improvements and partnership working are further tactical contributions to deliver to the overall strategy:

- Integrated and coordinated delivery across all commercial operations
- All commercial operations and trading units to make a positive contribution towards our conservation priorities
- To deliver best practice in all that we do
- To identify, develop and maintain new and existing partnerships/relationships
- To introduce cultural change by leading by example in all that we do.

All of the commercial functions are focused on optimising our margins, and reducing operating costs in order to achieve maximum profitability, although this is becoming increasingly challenging under very difficult trading conditions where people are looking to get 'more for less'. So, we have to strike a balance between maximising profit and remaining competitive.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Q. A lot is said in the new five-year strategy about improved engagement with local communities and members. How is this going to be achieved?

A. It was made absolutely clear to us through the independent review, and the views expressed through the 'Tak Tent' survey of summer 2011, that community involvement and engagement should be a central objective within the strategy. We are taking forward a range of actions in response.

For example, we have looked at our advisory panel structure and from 2012 have introduced a series of 'Local Assemblies' alongside our AGM to improve communication and engagement. These are scheduled at a range of locations and dates as follows:

- Sat 14 April 2012 (from 2.00 pm), Culloden Visitor Centre – Local Assembly
- Wed 6 June 2012 (from 5.45 pm), London Assembly, Royal Geographical Society
- Wed 12 Sept 2012 (from 11.00 am), Haddo House – Local Assembly
- Sat 22 Sept 2012 (from 11.00 am), General Assembly Hall, the Mound, Edinburgh – National Trust for Scotland 2012 AGM to be run in the morning followed by an Edinburgh and east Local Assembly in the afternoon (from 2.00 pm)
- Wed 17 Oct 2012 (from 11.00 am), Threave Estate and Garden – Local Assembly
- Sat 27 April 2013 – Glasgow – Venue to be confirmed – Local Assembly

At the time of writing, we are considering fixing further dates for assemblies in other locations.

We also acknowledge the role that 'signature projects', as introduced under our new five-year strategy, may play. These are of great importance, not only because we can begin implementation of real change at a pace, scale and affordability that the Trust can realistically bear, but also because we can try out new approaches and initiatives relevant to community engagement and see what we can learn from them.

At the national level, heritage as a concept and the Trust itself has to appeal to a wider range of people if we are to make the necessary connections with communities. We want people to share our conservation aims and come to think of themselves as Trustees also – this will depend on the way in which we take forward our marketing and communications, and we will have to do much more to link communities with the heritage we look after in their area: we need to show people that this is their community's heritage too.

But we should not confine ourselves to thinking of communities as being merely geographical: there are 'communities' of interest too, and we need to engage with a much wider range of people of different backgrounds and appeal to them on the basis of their particular 'bit' of heritage – whether it be through school-work, a love of history, gardens, the outdoors and so forth.

CONSERVATION

Q. What is the Trust's future strategy for conservation work?

A. As we have made clear through the new five-year strategy, we have, for the avoidance of all doubt, set conservation at the very core of all that we do – our Core Purpose is to conserve and promote our heritage, something universally endorsed through the summer 2011 'Tak Tent' survey. We want to inform, inspire and engage everyone in the protection of Scotland's heritage, whether it's our pioneering work to protect the rare Scotch bonnet moth, disappearing mud houses, or invaluable work undertaken by volunteers at Thistle Camps, such as repairing high altitude footpaths at Ben Lomond, planting wild flowers at the Hill of Tarvit, woodland restructuring at Mar Lodge Estate and habitat restoration at Ben Lawers. We still strive for excellence in all we do. Our conservation work is driven by a thorough understanding of the significance of the asset, and a considerable part of future work planning will concentrate on developing this understanding, as is being taken forward through the heritage portfolio review.

Q. How much maintenance work does the Trust carry out at its properties?

A. The Trust has continued to invest in conservation and maintenance work across the whole of its varied and diverse estate. Priority has been given to project work that addresses statutory and non-statutory requirements (e.g. roof, electrical and other similar inspections) and we have committed dedicated funds for implementing any necessary work that arises – we undertake essential surveys that inform our conservation work and provide a high visibility of any deterioration so that action may be taken.

These enable us to ensure that if any of our main properties may be in danger of deteriorating to an unacceptable level that we can fast-track works to prevent this.

The spend on conservation in the 2010/11 financial year was £9.9 million, up 36% on spending in the previous year, and it represents both a considerable commitment to our conservation obligations and the opportunity to carry out previously delayed projects.

Q. How much does the Trust's conservation work cost?

A. The Trust always did have knowledge on how much the conservation of our assets costs. For example, the quinquennial surveys on historic buildings articulate a wide range of costs in terms of urgent, necessary and desirable works.

Consequently we are able to bring forward on an annual basis a costed programme of projects and prioritised works – in effect we DO know what it costs to maintain our properties to appropriate standards. It must be acknowledged that the conservation cost profiling is very different for parts of the estate – thus, understanding costs for the conservation of a habitat for mountain flora is fundamentally different from maintaining a garden wall.

A major exercise to evaluate the repair, maintenance and improvement costs for the estate was undertaken a few years ago, and, in part through the current heritage portfolio review, this work is being re-examined and refreshed, with substantial progress made since last year. In addition, work looking at comparative costs across types of Trust property is underway, and will inform a high-level budget discussion on conservation spend. At a property level, quinquennial surveys will continue to be rolled out, and as part of the Conservation Management Planning process, development frameworks (including business plans and related cost plans) are advancing on a property by property basis.

The heritage portfolio review is bringing a new degree of detail and rigour to the process that will allow us to put a figure on how much it would cost to complete all of our ambitions for our portfolio and to take advantage of the many opportunities to fulfil our core purpose. It is this figure to secure the comprehensive, long-term conservation of our properties that will give us our targets in the forthcoming fund-raising appeal mentioned in our new five-year strategy.

CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS

Q. What are Conservation Agreements and what have they to do with the Trust?

A. The Trust is responsible for 430 Conservation Agreements to manage and protect large areas of Scotland which we neither own nor manage directly. These agreements are a powerful land management tool set up under the original Enabling Legislation which created the Trust, but have been facing a series of challenges under recent Scottish Land Reform legislation. We have responded robustly to all.

Q. How does the Trust enforce such agreements?

A. In 2010, the Trust Board set up and empowered a Scrutiny Panel to review and update our Conservation Agreement management practice and to take steps to bring original agreements up to date. The Scrutiny Panel has been effective in responding to challenges across the country, updating agreements where required and working in partnership with local authorities to build Conservation Agreement protections into the Local Development Plan system. A system of charging has been introduced and a commercial negotiating framework has been introduced to reinforce the protection and cover the costs of maintaining this protection. Conservation Agreements should continue to be a key protection tool in our conservation management armoury.

CONSULTANTS

Q. How much does the Trust spend on consultants annually?

A. We use the term 'consultant' to describe any service or specialism we have to outsource from third parties because we cannot provide it ourselves. This may well be different from the way other people or organisations commonly perceive the term. For example, in the 2010/11 financial year we spent £2.6m on consultants, which included specialist expertise brought in as part of the completion of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. We make particular efforts to ensure that, as far as is possible in each set of circumstances, any consultancy expertise we buy in is sourced from businesses local to our properties.

Q. How are consultants appointed?

A. The Trust has a procurement process which is overseen by a Procurement Manager. Any spend over £10k requires a minimum of three tenders, other than in exceptional circumstances e.g. if a specialist service is to be provided and there is only one supplier.

COUNTRYSIDE

Q. How is the Trust promoting its countryside properties?

A. We were full participants in the Scottish Government's 'Year of Active Scotland' and have been engaged in promoting properties such as Glencoe and the Mar Lodge Estate in terms of being 'green gyms'.

Associated with that we have also encouraged fund-raisers and groups to undertake the 'Munro Challenge' and use the Munro Mountains on our properties as a means to generate sponsorship. This has helped us to highlight the costs of providing access to the countryside and maintaining such infrastructure as mountain footpaths and car parks. Our 'Sole Trader' appeal was re-launched as the 'Footpath Fund' and direct mail went to 24,000 donors and a selection of our members. This appeal has the goal of raising £110,000 to help fund our Mountain Path Management Team and Mountains for People Project.

We have developed a new countryside marketing strategy and we are about to enact this through a range of promotional initiatives and materials. This is a key area for us to succeed in, as many people who value their 'right to roam' in the countryside do not realise that this right comes at a cost. The Trust is often bearing that cost and needs contributions from those who love our wild lands, even if they do not wish to join an organisation like the Trust.

As with other activities, we work in partnership with other organisations, such as VisitScotland, to promote our countryside properties. One example of this is through their new initiative 'Grab A Glen', which involves a travel writer visiting various areas of the country and reporting on his outdoor experiences.

2013 has been designated as the 'Year of Natural Scotland' by the Scottish Government and we will participate fully in the efforts to encourage urban Scots to get out and experience the wilder parts of their country.

CRATHES

Q. Why did the Trust take forward the 'Go Ape' development at Crathes?

A. The Trust wants to reach out to as wide an audience as possible, raising awareness of our charity and its vital role in encouraging access to Scotland's natural and cultural heritage. Our work with Go Ape has undoubtedly helped us to provide an exciting outdoor experience for an age group we often find challenging to engage with: young adults. We are now able at Crathes to offer activities that appeal to every age group, from our nature activities for toddlers, to theatre and music for adults. We think that Go Ape has helped us establish Crathes as one of Aberdeenshire's must-see destinations for visitors and locals alike, adding a new dimension to the estate. The reactions from locals and visitors have been very positive.

Q. What is the environmental impact of the Go Ape development?

A. As you would expect, environmental considerations have been key throughout our discussions and input from our own conservation specialists was key in choosing the location for the trail, which offers visitors a whole new perspective on Crathes.

CULZEAN

Q. What changes have been made at Culzean Castle?

A. We have recently invested a considerable amount of money, time, expertise and the goodwill of volunteers and benefactors in maintaining and enhancing Culzean Castle.

We have re-instated and sensitively restored key rooms and features, including a previously unknown Adam fireplace, by opening up the original archway to the justly famous oval staircase, commissioning and fitting a carpet which represents the oval staircase as it would have been, and, through the generosity of the Kennedy family, being able to locate and return many original paintings and items of furniture.

We have also introduced cutting-edge interpretive technology, which has been very well received by the majority of our visitors. This provides a multimedia tour featuring specially commissioned period dramatisations showing family and servant life in the rooms, and material related to President Eisenhower's time at Culzean.

The tired and truly out of date Eisenhower exhibition has been removed to allow the restoration of that area to its previous use as private family rooms, as they would have been at the time of the President's first visit – so visitors now see what the President himself saw. The exhibition has been replaced in part by the new technology, but the physical artefacts are simply in storage pending a new and much improved display being developed in due course.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE CENTRE

Q. Given the commitments in the Trust's new strategy, is the future of the David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre now secure?

A. The David Livingstone Centre is not actually a property that belongs to the Trust. We manage the centre under contract to the Trustees of the David Livingstone Centre on the basis of funding provided by South Lanarkshire Council. There is a contractual understanding that we provide these management services so long as there is no cost to the Trust. We have been trying to assist the Trustees in coming forward with a plan or feasibility study as to how the centre may be developed and what functions it could serve in preserving the memory of one of Scotland's greatest sons. In February 2012, the welcome news that South Lanarkshire Council had agreed a two-year funding package for the centre was announced. This, along with extra support from the Trust, will provide breathing space to progress a sustainable, long-term business model for the David Livingstone Centre.

Q. What is being planned to mark the Bicentenary of David Livingstone's birth in 2013?

A. In May 2012, the Scottish Government announced generous funding support under 'Project 2013, Looking for Livingstone'. £100,000 has been allocated to bicentenary activities. In addition, the National Museum of Scotland is also being funded to take part of its exhibition on Livingstone to Malawi and to work with museums out there. More details will be announced in due course of the celebrations and events planned for 2013.

DUDDINGSTON

Q. What is the situation regarding the sale of land in Duddingston Village?

A. We offered Duddingston Village Conservation Society (DVCS) the option of purchasing land outright from the Trust in order to secure its use for local amenity purposes. The offer follows on from the strategic decision taken by our Trustees to re-evaluate ownership of holdings which have little or no heritage value and concentrate the charity's resources on properties with heritage significance.

The three quarters of an acre plot in question rises up the side of Arthur's Seat from Duddingston Village, and comprises the former 'paddock', 'tennis court' and an allotment.

The plot was originally purchased by the Trust (along with a neighbouring property) in 1999 and is primarily used as a local amenity with no access for the general public. The Trust's 30-year involvement with Duddingston Village originates with a legacy from the late Miss Christina McNiven. Her house was given to the Trust, and was put up for sale so that the proceeds could be invested to establish a fund to support the charity's conservation objectives.

Although Ms McNiven never asked that the Trust do more than associate itself with the village and its history, nor restrict the funds from her legacy for use in Duddingston, the charity has devoted a significant proportion of monies generated from the seedcorn of her estate to local projects. Over the years this has resulted in gifts made to the village church for traffic calming, allocations to Dr Neil's Garden Trust (which cares for another garden elsewhere in Duddingston), including the wages of a part-time gardener, and refurbishment of Thomson's Tower. The original sum received from the sale of Ms McNiven's house has been spent on the village many times over. The plot of land will be put up for sale over the summer of 2012.

ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

Q. What impact has the current economic situation had on the Trust?

A. The Trust maintains a solvent and stable position, despite some rather unpredictable manifestations of the current economic situation that are both positive and negative. Our membership levels have actually increased, despite real fears of job losses across the country and, indeed, the growth in membership went into veritable overdrive at the beginning of the 2011 summer season with 6,000 new members joining the Trust in May and June of that year alone. In 2010/11, visitor numbers increased by 19% on the 2009/10 level, although this must be partly due to the effect of the opening of the new Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, just as the financial year came to a close.

However, the number of paying visitors was slightly down – although we cannot underestimate the effect of the extremely bad winter weather in 2010/11 rather than pinning this altogether on the economy. We have also watched some extreme fluctuations in visitors' spending at properties in terms of catering and retail. The trend was for declining expenditure (also reflected by others in the heritage sector), which somewhat unexpectedly reversed itself over the summer of 2011. We can surmise that the weather this time worked in our favour by encouraging people to escape the rain through retail therapy and comfort eating!

Legacies actually rose over the year and our investment advisors were able to ensure a strong performance for the Trust through its stocks, shares and investment property portfolio.

As the economic turbulence continues, it is very difficult to predict where this might lead but we must always prepare for the worst case, and we know that we must overturn the underlying issue with the Trust's finances, which is that the estate in the long-term costs more to run and maintain than we take in from current sources of income.

ENVIRONMENT

Q. How is the Trust working to reduce its environmental impact?

A. Many properties are working hard at a local level to reduce resource usage, buying locally sourced, sustainable products and providing visitor information on environmental issues:

- Our visitor properties have received Green Tourism Business Scheme awards, with several moving from Bronze to Silver at re-audits, and Balmacara moving from a Silver to a Gold award. Glencoe, Culloden, and Killiecrankie have also achieved a Gold status
- New exhibition trailers are specified to ensure minimal energy requirements, using technologies such as LED lighting with PIR sensors (so the lights only switch on when people are around). Investigation of solar-powered trailers is ongoing, and one of the trailers is battery-powered with a view to refitting it to use renewable power in the future
- A recent mobile phone and printer cartridge recycling campaign in its first month saw 86kg of waste being diverted from landfill
- Recycled carpeting was used in the fit-out of our new HQ at Hermiston Quay
- Improved printing solutions were adopted at HQ which will result in an 80% reduction in energy use (9,239 kWh to 1,850 kWh) and a 53% reduction in CO_2 emissions resulting from use of energy and paper. We are committed to building environmental efficiencies into the major projects we will take forward as part of our new five-year strategy.

FACEBOOK (NEW MEDIA)

Q. Will the Trust make use of modern social marketing tools like Facebook?

A. We have Facebook and Twitter sites and both continue to be useful ventures for the Trust. Our Facebook page now has more than 6,000 followers. We recognise that if we are to remain relevant in the 21st century, we must embrace new communication tools. The Trust is currently finalising a social media strategy to help ensure it explores the full possibilities of these types of communications channels.

FINANCES

Q. What is the health of the Trust's finances?

A. The Trust is continuing to take steps towards ensuring its long-term financial sustainability. The financial results show that, during the year ending 28 February 2011, the General Income Fund (the free reserves of the Trust which are the true measure of its financial health) had increased in value by 58%, to £13.4m from £8.5m. This remains short of our previous recommended level of £17m but progress is being made. This target is based on a formula linked to actual running costs of the Trust and we have within the Trust's new five-year strategy set a new target of £21m at today's prices to be achieved by 2016.

There has been an increase in general funds, which brings short-term stability to the Trust. However, underlying trends on operating income and expenditure indicate challenging times ahead – which is why we must look to a step change in our income sources.

Our investment portfolio combined with greater than expected legacies all contributed to income growth in 2010/11, although offset by one-off repayment of grants, as well as implementation of a long-delayed and long-expected new pay deal for staff, including a significant investment in staff pay progression. Despite this we were able to spend more on conservation (up 36%) and take forward previously delayed projects.

Q. Is the Trust running at a surplus or deficit?

A. Operationally, most of our properties run at a deficit. Only ten currently have adequate endowments to cover running costs, and in the main these are the properties that were acquired most recently. It is this underlying problem that we have to address through the long-term fund-raising campaign we have outlined in our new five-year strategy. The ten fully endowed properties are:

MAR LODGE ESTATE	BEN LOMOND	DOLLAR GLEN	CORRIESHALLOCH
NEWHAILES	HILL HOUSE	HOLMWOOD	STAFFA
IONA	ROCKLIFFE		

Q. Given the Trust's finances in previous years, can it finance all of the ambitions set out in the new five-year strategy?

A. Although the efficiencies of 2008/09 were painful, they did, as the Rt Hon George Reid said in the 2010 strategic review report, give us 'breathing space'. However, the underlying problem that we spend more on properties than we bring in is still there and must be dealt with – in the short term we have sufficient income from legacies and other sources to overcome the expenditure imbalance, stay solvent and invest in the changes we need to make for the long term.

We are introducing 'Signature projects' which should be regarded as a means actually to begin implementation of real change at a pace, scale and affordability that the Trust can realistically bear.

Through these projects we plan to invest in new systems as well as a major international fund-raising appeal that will bring in new and different forms of income – but we will progress this in stages, investing set amounts at first, and then using the income we generate to cover the original costs and then the costs of the next set of initiatives. We will not be spending a huge amount of money all at once in the first year of delivering our new strategy; we will be aiming to 'snowball' progress and yet live within our means.

If the world financial situation dictates that we slow down our pace of change, then we will. The objectives and goals will remain constant and will simply carry over into our next five-year strategy – we really are taking the long-term view and ensuring a level of consistency that was perhaps lacking in the past.

We can also seek to make reasonable efficiencies, such as reducing energy consumption and sharing services with others where possible. We also have an advantage that, as a charity, we already have a relatively small staff overhead for a national organisation – we don't carry 'dead weight' and most of what we spend goes to the heritage we protect. As the Rt Hon George Reid noted, this is a double-edged sword – we are both 'too small' and 'too big' – but the issue is not to change size necessarily but to change some of what we do and do the rest better and more efficiently.

We can also do much more to realise income from our properties (for example we are bringing in an EPOS – Electronic Point of Sale – system to make our retail function more responsive to demand), through rentals and alternative uses which don't conflict with heritage significance.

Where appropriate, we can sell land that has no heritage significance – for example, income from the sale of Suntrap Garden and a parcel of land at Duddingston will be reinvested directly into our heritage properties. The Rt Hon George Reid specifically said that if 'byres and scraps of land' could not serve our core heritage purpose in some way, we should not hold on to them.

Q. Are the Trust's finances sustainable?

A. Savings and efficiencies made by the Trust have been vital in extending our 'breathing space' but the Trust's underlying financial position as it stands is NOT sustainable. We have achieved an even keel in the short term and now we have to find a way forward that will allow us to live within our means and yet deliver our core purpose. We are under no illusions that this is going to be an immense challenge but that is what we have committed ourselves to in the new five-year strategy.

FUEL PRICES

Q. What effect have the significant rises in fuel prices had on the Trust?

A. This has clearly had a direct effect in terms of purchase of fuel for the Trust's vehicles, the fact that we have had to raise the amount we pay staff in expenses for vehicle mileage claims and in terms of the cost of heating oil. This is certainly something that is spurring us on to achieve greater energy efficiency at our properties.

As regards the effect this has had on members and visitors going to properties, especially given that many of our more remote sites can only be reached in practical terms by car, we suspect that the initial reduction in paying visitors in 2010/11 may be partly attributable to fuel costs, as well, of course, to the extremely bad winter weather. However, in the summer of 2011 we saw something of an upturn, with as many as 6,000 new members joining the Trust in May and June of that year alone. It is possible that the wider economic situation in Europe has prompted more people to consider breaks and holidays in the UK and we have benefited from this, partly offsetting the effects of fuel costs.

FUNDRAISING

Q. How does the Trust plan to take forward the major fund-raising appeal it proposes in the new five-year strategy?

A. We have already made a start. A new three-year fund-raising strategy was developed for the organisation and is being implemented. This takes a strategic approach to fund-raising across the organisation. Key activities include the exploration of new growth areas including grants and partnership funding, converting more members to donors and building on the success of our major donors programme. We are also investing in stewardship to better look after the donors we already have.

We have begun to see dividends being paid, represented by £3.408m raised in 2010/11 through donations and appeals versus £2.088m in 2009/10. This is partly the result of focusing on specific, themed appeals, such as for 'Sole Trading' and our 'Snow Damage' appeals.

We have also had great success with our 'Secret Garden Appeal' for Arduaine Garden, which has raised enough to boost that property's endowment to the target level and beyond. We have invested more in legacy fund-raising – a major source of income for the Trust – although this is obviously something that takes effect in the longer term. The initial stages of the strategy have focused on addressing internal capacity and the prioritisation of fund-raising activity.

As regards the major long-term campaign referred to in the new five-year strategy, this is going to be of a different order of magnitude from anything we have attempted before.

By necessity, this campaign will stretch over at least a decade, will be international in nature and will be designed to achieve nothing less than raising the tens of millions we need to endow our entire estate and carry out all of the conservation work we think is necessary. We need to get this right and design the campaign carefully and professionally, taking world-class advice on how we do so – there is precedent for major institutions, such as universities, carrying out endeavours of a similar scale. We will not rush into this; we cannot say at this point if it will be a single-themed campaign or a rolling series of staged and separately badged mini-campaigns making up the whole. That will depend on the conclusion of the very detailed scoping and planning exercise we will be undertaking.

GOVERNMENT/TAXPAYER SUPPORT

Q. What support does the Scottish Government give the Trust?

A. The Trust has a good relationship with the Scottish Government and receives considerable sums to support specific projects for public benefit.

The Scottish Government provided £8.6m in support of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in 2010 and in 2011 pledged £5m towards the new Bannockburn Visitor Centre which is now under construction.

We also receive grants from Historic Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and various Local Authorities. We are in the final year of a three-year agreement with Historic Scotland under which they will contribute up to £1.05m to our planned maintenance works and we have a new one-year agreement with SNH which will generate around £700k subject to the Trust meeting certain expenditure and conservation targets.

Q. In light of cuts in public sector spending, is the Trust anticipating a significant reduction in financial support?

A. Like many organisations, we are preparing for the likelihood that our support from central government and its agencies will be reduced in the coming years. The Trust currently receives annual grants of £1.4m through the three-year concordats with Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. Our intention is to do more ourselves by following up the income-generation and partnership opportunities coming to light via the heritage property portfolio review, as well as implement greater operational efficiencies, and this will help offset any loss of direct Government support.

HADDO HOUSE

Q. What are the Trust's plans for Haddo House?

A. We are exploring options in connection with Haddo House that would provide the best long-term solution to ensuring its conservation and ongoing public access. A suggestion that part of the property become a boutique hotel was one of the options discussed (although no concrete plans of any sort have been made) as it was thought this might be a way of improving the property's income generation potential through weddings and events. Whatever the case, our objective is to retain the property in Trust ownership if at all possible.

Consultants have been engaged to look at the options in detail and a final report is expected in the spring of 2012, although further work will be required before any final decision can be taken.

HILL HOUSE

Q. What is the current condition of the Hill House?

A. Since its completion in 1904, the Hill House has suffered from the effects of moisture penetration though its external plasterwork – a then relatively untried cement-based harling applied at the behest of the client to give him a house devoid of 'adventitious ornamentation' with 'grey rough cast' to complement the grey Ballachulish slate roof finish.

To achieve this, Mackintosh dispensed with many of the normal weathering details, such as projecting chimney and skew copes, relying instead upon the harling to weatherproof these vulnerable areas. However, despite numerous attempts since its completion to minimise ingress, including several large-scale repair projects, continual ongoing maintenance and monitoring, and a plethora of specialist reports, external harling failures and outbreaks of dry rot internally signal that an inherent problem still exists today.

Previous repair approaches at the property have been the subject of much debate, having gone from an invasive approach of stripping and re-applying 'like-for-like' cement-based harling over a new and/or consolidated masonry/ brick background, to a more conservative approach based upon retention and consolidation of surviving finishes.

The Hill House is clearly a place of the highest cultural significance, and must be well cared for. The Trust is currently exploring how best to resolve the longstanding issues of water ingress and the associated damp caused by the cement harling, which at the time of building was relatively untried.

We are currently developing broader stakeholder partnerships to help us explore the most appropriate and effective technical solutions that best protect the significance of the property. Of course, in the meantime, the Trust is continuing its ongoing programme of maintenance at the property which attracts close to 25,000 visitors annually.

In the longer term, we do recognise that a major project may well be needed. Of course, as a charity, we will require to raise funding and seek support for a piece of work on that scale.

The situation at the Hill House is an example of just how complex the conservation of our heritage can be. We really understand the public's concerns about the visual state of the building. The technical complexities of dealing with such serious building issues on a building of such significance are immense. That's why the Trust is being very thorough in its research before beginning any work.

HOLIDAYS/CRUISES

Q. Why does the Trust provide rented holiday accommodation and paid-for cruises?

A. These are, of course, solid sources of income to the Trust which we can then re-invest in conservation. However, they also ensure the ongoing accessibility of the properties, landscapes and islands we care for in enjoyable and interesting ways. Holiday-makers will use our properties as a basis to explore local heritage and other attractions within Scotland, and those joining our cruises are not only able to visit and support the economies of our farthest-flung island communities but also to enjoy talks and lectures about Scottish heritage and culture.

Q. How have holiday cottages performed for the Trust?

A. In 2011, holiday cottages traded 6% ahead of the foregoing year, which shows an increase in profit of £32,626. Disappointingly the National Lighthouse Board are selling their properties, apart from those at Mull of Galloway, which will mean a reduction of six locations in our portfolio. However, we will be opening Gate Lodge at Inverewe and taking on a further two privately owned properties which should offset most of the losses.

Q. How has the cruise market performed?

A. 2011 income was 9.24% ahead of 2010, with an increase of £159,264 in profit. The cruises went very well indeed, and 2012 cruises are taking in a very high level of bookings. We are making use of a new ship (from Saga Cruises), *Quest for Adventure*, which is 94 berths larger than our previous ship *Spirit of Adventure*.

HUGH MILLER MUSEUM

Q. How is the very large donation received towards the museum being spent?

A. One of the largest single donations the Trust has ever received – £600,000 – was made towards the Museum and Birthplace Cottage in Cromarty in October 2010. This gift was used to create a special fund called the 'Middleton Fund' to be used solely to meet the costs of staffing and keeping the property open. We were able as a result to reinstate a full-time curator/manager, and restore the museum's opening hours to seven days a week during the summer season and we continue to work closely with the Friends of Hugh Miller support group to ensure that new initiatives and programmes can be developed.

INALIENABILITY (NOT TRANSFERABLE TO OTHERS' OWNERSHIP)

Q. What is the Trust's position on the inalienability of properties?

A. Our Board of Trustees is fully committed to the important principle of inalienability in order to offer our properties all due protection.

Trustees are determined to 'unlock the potential' of our properties as a means to ensure their continued conservation.

In exceptional circumstances we would consider transfer of ownership or responsibility for an individual property if:

- we felt that this would offer the best solution to ensuring that property's ongoing conservation; or
- this was in the best interests of the Trust and if this was subject to appropriate safeguards.

Where appropriate, we will also consider transfer of properties, or parts of properties, which have limited heritage value, or do not significantly advance our charitable purposes, if in either case this helps with the upkeep and maintenance of the remainder of our properties.

We are not considering the transfer of any major property at this point.

INVEREWE GARDEN

Q. What are the Trust's plans at Inverewe?

A. In response to a gradual but steady decline in visitor numbers and the challenge presented by storm damage at Inverewe Garden, we commissioned independent researchers to undertake a business review of the property.

Storm damage to the shelter belt of trees which protect Inverewe from full exposure to salt-laden winds will become a real threat to this special place unless addressed quickly. However, a more fundamental concern is that declining revenue associated with falling visitor numbers limits the Trust's ability to allocate sufficient resources to maintaining this unique site.

We have to think about new ways of generating income, of harnessing local resources and making better use of land and property assets within the wider Trust-owned Estate beyond the boundaries of the garden. For example, this might mean better use of Inverewe House, development of holiday accommodation or opening up access to the surrounding wild land.

In challenging the status quo, we should be prepared to consider different management options. However, no one should think that this means we are planning to sell Inverewe Garden. The Trust has accepted responsibility for maintaining the garden and its traditions on behalf of the nation and our members and this responsibility will be upheld.

We are certainly open to alternatives that might more closely involve the community in managing the site.

The consultant's report has been delivered to the Trust and the implications of its recommendations are now under consideration. Trust Managers and Board Members are investigating the options described in the report in more detail before making an appropriate decision on the way forward. This work is being undertaken as part of a wider, ongoing review of the estate.

Q. Is Inverewe to be a 'signature project'?

A. Yes. More work is to be done before the property can formally be launched as a signature project but, clearly our earlier assessments and option appraisals will play a significant part in underpinning the property's new status. We expect project preparation and work to begin in earnest by the end of this year.

Q. What does 'signature project' status actually mean for Inverewe?

A. Signature project status leads to intensive and radical re-evaluation of the potential for improvement across all aspects of conservation and visitor experience.

Inverewe will be the proving ground for a thorough review of everything we do – from visitor interpretation to catering, from conservation to energy and income generation. The lessons learned will be applied right across our portfolio.

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

Q. How does the Trust take investment decisions?

A. Our investment advisory committee advises on such opportunities to generate long-term income and comprises individuals with world-class experience in financial matters: we rely on their considerable expertise. Committee members undertake work for the Trust on a pro-bono basis. They have given up their time because they support the Trust and its objectives, and in turn we have received the kind of insight that would otherwise be impossible for a Charity to obtain.

The recommendations made by the Committee across the entire investment portfolio held by the Trust are subject to scrutiny by our Audit and Risk Management Committee and our Board of Trustees.

How we use endowment funding gifted to us for the purposes of investment is of direct importance to our ability to generate long-term income to use for the upkeep and conservation of our properties, and to pay our staff and contractors.

These monies are donated to us on the proviso that we invest them and do not spend them in the short term. We are legally barred from simply spending these monies directly on our own properties and, consequently, if we are going to invest them, common sense dictates we do so where they are going to secure the best return.

Decisions to invest some of this money in retail property, for example, therefore does not take resources away from the entirely separate funding allocations to our own properties. However, it does bring back a high rate of annual return which does goes towards our properties and other overheads. In this instance, we received a far higher rate of return than we could have achieved by simply banking the money, given current interest rates.

We are extremely grateful to our advisors for the income they have helped us generate, which in turn played no small part in helping us to stabilise our finances and to continue the ongoing conservation of Scotland's heritage.

KILLIECRANKIE

Q. What impact is the bungee jump at the Pass of Killiecrankie having?

A. The Highland Fling Bungee Jump operation is located away from the site of the Battle of Killiecrankie and away from the important natural habitats and landscapes of the pass. It is far enough away from the main pathways not to disturb the quiet solitude of the area. We would never have permitted the development if we had felt it might ruin the ambience of the property.

What the bungee jump has achieved, however, is a significant growth in the number of visitors – and from an age group and demographic that is usually very difficult to tempt into a heritage property. This gives our countryside rangers – not to mention our membership recruitment team – an opportunity to engage with those coming to try the bungee jump and to offer information about the history and nature of the area, as well as the other stimulating opportunities to be found at our full range of outdoor properties and wild lands.

LEITH HALL

Q. What are the Trust's plans at Leith Hall mansionhouse?

A. Our intention is to open Leith Hall again as soon as we can. A planning application has been submitted to support proposals to improve the property and this relates to improvements to letting flats, the tearoom and staff facilities. The garden and grounds currently remain open to the public.

LITTLE HOUSES IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

Q. What is the Little Houses Improvement Scheme?

A. The Little Houses Improvement Scheme (LHIS) is a branch of the National Trust for Scotland's Buildings Department that works to save, restore and regenerate historic and vernacular domestic buildings throughout Scotland.

The LHIS was designed to address the threats posed to buildings which are on a smaller scale compared to the Trust's more well-known castles and country houses, but which are no less important to the architectural and cultural heritage of Scotland. LHIS projects are usually undertaken where buildings of importance are under threat of dereliction, decay and neglect.

The buildings are often in historic townscapes, where neglected and dilapidated buildings of any period contribute to a general air of neglect and degeneration. Conversely, a sympathetic restoration to a building of architectural merit can have benefits beyond saving the individual fabric, often leading to wider regeneration and renewal of local pride.

The LHIS is a Building Preservation Trust and a member of the Association of Preservation Trusts.

Q. How does the Trust fund this scheme?

A. All Little Houses Improvement Scheme projects are funded through external sources. Our most recent project, in Peterhead, was completed in the spring of 2011 and was a great success. A group of derelict Georgian townhouses in the heart of the old burgh have been restored and adapted to provide community care housing. The granite buildings are representative of a time of great growth in the town, as a spa resort and port. The project was the first Priority Project in the Peterhead Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS), a programme for the regeneration of Peterhead's Outstanding Conservation Area with funding from Historic Scotland and Aberdeenshire Council.

MAR LODGE ESTATE

Q. Why is the Mar Lodge Estate so important?

A. The National Trust for Scotland took ownership of Mar Lodge Estate on 30 June 1995. It is the largest property of its kind owned by a charitable trust in Britain, and is one of the most important nature conservation areas in the UK. It contains some of Britain's most valued, remote, wild and scenic landscapes and a wealth of history that demonstrates how people lived and worked in this beautiful area over the past 500 years.

From the lowest point on the valley floor (300 m) to the top of Ben Macdui (1,309 m), Mar Lodge Estate supports a wide range of habitats. These include Caledonian pine forest, blanket bog, montane habitats, heather moorland and snowbed communities. These habitats support a large number and diversity of species, many of which are rare and of local, national or international significance. The conservation importance of the habitats and species within Mar Lodge Estate has led to over 40% of the estate being designated both nationally and internationally. Mar Lodge Estate forms part of the Cairngorms Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area which are European conservation designations. It also forms part of the Cairngorms and Eastern Cairngorms Sites of Special Scientific Interest which are UK designations. Finally, the estate has two lochs which are of European significance and which are designated as Ramsar sites.

The Forest of Mar is a remnant of the native Caledonian pinewoods that once covered much of the Highlands. It is home to a group of pinewood species which include red squirrels, pine martens, capercaillie, Scottish crossbill, wood ants, fungi and wild flowers.

Following centuries of felling and heavy grazing, which have prevented the growth of young trees, the Trust is now actively encouraging the regeneration of native woodland, in part through control of the deer population. We have recently reduced deer numbers to target levels and we are now beginning to see improved growth of the regeneration and a considerable reduction in browsing. Hopefully this will continue and we will see the revival of the forest for the future.

Heather moorland is a globally rare habitat and Scotland is a key country for its conservation. The moorland within Mar Lodge is of European significance and it supports significant populations of red grouse, waders, mountain hares and birds of prey.

The Cairngorms are also home to the largest area of arctic-alpine flora in Britain and the Cairngorm plateau is one of the areas least managed by man in the UK.

This high altitude area supports numerous plants and birds of special scientific interest. Dotterel and snow bunting are important species living in the montane areas. There are few breeding pairs of these birds in Scotland and they are right at the edge of their species distributions. Mar Lodge Estate is renowned for the snowbed communities of mosses and liverworts that it supports in the mountains. These communities are increasingly important as they are likely to be vulnerable to climate change. The rivers, streams and burns of Mar Lodge should not be forgotten as these include the headwaters of the River Dee and are home to numerous interesting and important species. The rivers are characterised by species such as dipper, otter, common sandpiper and watervole. They are also of course home to the Atlantic salmon, which has both important economic and conservation value. Thankfully, numbers of salmon appear to be increasing in the River Dee.

Q. What is the Trust trying to achieve at Mar Lodge Estate?

A. Since taking ownership in 1995, the Trust has sought to manage the estate in a sustainable way for the benefit of the nation. In doing so, we have attempted to achieve a balance in honouring the wishes of a principal funder in running the property as a Highland sporting estate, whilst promoting public access and conserving and restoring the estate's internationally important geology, flora, fauna, wild landscapes, built heritage, archaeology and collections.

Most significantly, we have set about saving remnants of the ancient Caledonian pine forest and beginning its active regeneration, reversing the decline and disappearance of this stunning habitat from the Highlands and helping it to survive for future generations.

Given the relative novelty of this approach in this context, we freely admit that it has proven to be difficult to implement at times, and many lessons have been learned along the way.

Our achievements thus far have included:

- achieving some impressive results with the re-establishment of the Caledonian forest, with promising numbers of tree seedlings appearing
- protection and encouragement of research into the estate's historic and archaeological features
- care for the collection within Mar Lodge
- removing the Beinn a Bhuird track – a 4.6km upland track – an exemplar of hill-track restoration at high altitudes
- promoting public access and welcoming more than 1.5 million visitors over the past 15 years, including walkers, cyclists, campers and sporting guests
- maintaining 210 km of footpaths and converting inappropriate vehicle tracks to footpaths
- working with the Mountain Bothies Association to upgrade the Corrour Bothy, rebuild Bob Scott's Bothy and explore the future of the Hutchinson Bothy
- conserving and exploring sustainable uses for built structures on the estate including consolidation works at Bynach and Geldie Lodges, Red House and Queen Victoria's Picnic Lodge and repairs to Derry Lodge
- monitoring and managing woodland and moorland grouse species
- enhancing sporting activities on the estate with the greater use of traditional methods such as Highland ponies
- expanding our well-established holiday accommodation, wedding, catering and corporate hospitality offerings
- running a year-round education programme for many different audiences – something we plan to develop further in the future.

Q. Why was the Trust's management of the estate criticised and why was an independent review undertaken?

A. A combination of factors. We have embarked on a 200-year delivery period in the restoration of the Caledonian Forest and the initial phases were marked by sluggishness in getting started and by failing adequately to explain what we were trying to achieve. Our culling of the over-sized deer population on the estate as a means of lessening their impact by grazing on the northern forest regeneration zone, as well as improving herd condition, was heavily criticised by people who did not agree with culling in principle. Also, sporting interests were equally critical and said the reduction in deer numbers was having a negative effect on neighbouring estates which relied on stalking and shooting for income.

Our delayed initiation of active management of the estate undoubtedly was a factor as it meant that the initial efforts to reduce the deer population were concentrated in a relatively short time scale and so were perceived as being particularly drastic. Additionally, the inevitably slow process of re-establishing lost areas of forest from seed added to the perception that little was being achieved at Mar Lodge.

To some extent the Trust has been caught in the middle of an ongoing national debate, with some claiming we have over-concentrated our management efforts on maintaining traditional Highland sport at Mar Lodge Estate at the expense of conservation efforts, with others claiming that we have done precisely the opposite: undermined traditional pursuits like deer stalking in favour of growing trees.

In the light of so much negative comment, and many inaccurate claims being made, our Board of Trustees took a decision to invite an independent panel to assess the situation on the basis of available and verifiable evidence and consider whether the Estate had been managed appropriately. The review panel was announced in April 2011 and published their report in the following December.

Q. What were the conclusions of the independent review at Mar Lodge Estate?

A. The Chair of the review panel, David Windmill and his fellow panelists, Professors Jeff Maxwell and Rory Putman, sought and received submissions from a wide range of stakeholders and conducted a thorough examination of the available evidence.

The panel's main findings were that:

- the Trust's management of the estate from the point of acquisition in 1995 until recently has lacked focus and co-ordination, with a particular weakness in terms of Highland estate management experience and expertise
- the lack of focus contributed to further weaknesses in community engagement and communication
- the Trust has actually been following accepted good practice in deer management and that this has led to successful regeneration and reintroduction of native woodland, although there may be scope to apply additional deer fencing in response to concerns expressed by neighbouring estates
- the Trust's overall objectives to develop a sustainable approach to managing a Highland sporting estate ecologically balanced with woodland regeneration, whilst ensuring accessibility to the public, remained laudable and achievable and that real progress was being made.

In presenting the report, David Windmill said: 'The situation at Mar Lodge Estate is complex and there are many nuances. We can say that some of the more lurid claims made in relation to management of the estate have no evidence to back them up. However, perception is key and the Trust did itself no favours from the outset by failing adequately to explain what it was trying to achieve to stakeholders and engage with local communities and communities of interest.

"I understand the controversy generated by the Trust's approach to deer management. In principle though, the methods used were appropriate and in line with wider practice – but we have made suggestions with regard to deer fencing which may help respond to the concerns of neighbouring estates and still ensure the Trust's ecological objectives are not compromised.

"Clearly, the Trust took on Mar Lodge Estate with the best of intentions and were pursuing a project far beyond anything they had attempted before. The central problem was that then existing management teams did not have the necessary estate management skills required to deliver the Trust's ambitions.

"I see positive signs that the situation is improving for the better and that the Trust's objectives are beginning to be realised in earnest. I hope that the panel's recommendations will give further impetus to this process."

Q. How is the Trust going to respond to the review's conclusions?

A. The report delivers a mix of tough and positive messages for the Trust and we have to accept, as we have previously in the public arena, that we could have done many things much more efficiently. It is certainly true that back in 1995, when beginning this regeneration project on a scale never tried before, there was a steep learning curve and it took us much longer than we had hoped to find our feet.

The lessons have been learned and are already being applied. We are starting to see the fruits of our efforts in terms of woodland regeneration and we have achieved considerable success in terms of hill-track and foot-path restoration, promoting public access and welcoming more than 1.5 million visitors over the past 15 years.

The central issue of contention was the use of culls as the primary control of the deer population level. We were pleased that the panel found that the Trust had used accepted methods and practices but fully understand that we and some stakeholders will have to agree to disagree on previous actions.

The main point to make is that the deer population is now at a level in balance with the available habitat and there should be no need for extensive culls in the future – indeed, we hope as the regenerated woodland matures that a healthy and strong deer population can be encouraged to graze within it.
We have essentially accepted virtually all of the recommendations made by the panel – in particular to establish a line of strategic fencing across the Linn of Dee in response to concerns from neighbouring estates about the movement of herds.

Q. What will the Trust's new Management Plan for Mar Lodge Estate do?

A. The plan will make it absolutely clear that the Trust's 'three pillars' – to continue ongoing conservation and restoration of the ancient Caledonian Forest, to run Mar Lodge as a traditional Highland estate and to ensure public access – are absolutely compatible and achievable.

The plan will show how we can achieve a complete balance and integration of objectives, delivering mutual benefit to the local community and the nation as a whole. It will set out in detail how we plan to advance our epic 200-year vision for the estate over the next five years and deal with some of the accurate criticisms made of our previous performance, especially in relation to engagement with the local community and other stakeholders.

Q. Are the Trust's attempts to regenerate the Caledonian forest working?

A. Absolutely. Our latest monitoring report shows a direct correlation between improved forest regeneration and the reduction of the deer population to a sustainable level in the last two to three years. Since 2009 we have seen the level of browsing (i.e. chewing and destroying) on shoot seedlings above vegetation height decline from 37.55% to 7.95%.

In terms of the actual density of regenerated woodland in the estate, our report shows that in some areas this has almost doubled since 2009.

Transect	Area surveyed (m2)	Density per hectare in 2011	Density per hectare in 2009
Beinn Bhreac	2000	5	5
Derry 1	2000	210	115
Derry 2	2000	150	20
Dubh Ghleann	2000	5	5
Luibeg	2000	285	160
Quoich 2	2000	185	35
Quoich 3	2000	5	5

Q. Why did the Trust cull deer on Mar Lodge Estate?

A. Most Highland estates carry out annual deer culls in order to maintain herds at a level that is in balance with the available habitat.

Our approach to deer management on the Mar Lodge Estate has been directed primarily at habitat management and ensuring that this is in favourable condition for deer and other species, or at least moving towards it.

When the Trust acquired Mar Lodge, an over-sized and unsustainable deer population was having a serious impact on natural habitats on the estate, which were in poor condition.

Deer are woodland animals but the population must be maintained at a level that is in balance with the available food sources, woodland shelter, etc. They no longer have any natural predators, so culling is required to prevent their numbers becoming too high and heavy grazing occurring. Failure to balance herd numbers may lead to starving animals in poor physical shape ranging far and wide in a desperate search for food – many road accidents have been attributed to just that situation. Nevertheless, as deer form an important part of any woodland fauna, it is our view that their complete exclusion is unnatural and their controlled impact through grazing, trampling and dunging contributes to the functioning of the pinewood system.

In order to manage the population, set numbers of the animals are shot by professional stalkers during the season, which for hinds extends between 1 October and 15 February and for stags from 1 July to 20 October. The numbers to be culled are determined on an estate-by-estate basis by local deer management groups, taking the size of the herd and local conditions into account.

Our forest regeneration zone is located in the northern third of the Mar Lodge Estate bounded by the Cairngorm plateau, and most of our culling is concentrated there.

Numbers of deer on our estate have been reduced from an unsustainable high point of 3,350 in 1995 to a current level of approximately 1,700.

This has allowed us to scale back our cull considerably – in 2009/10 it was 377 deer, the lowest on record. We think that from now on a cull of 350 deer a year would be sufficient to keep the overall deer population static and in balance with the local ecology.

The need to maintain this level of cull stems more or less exclusively from the rate of calving each year.

Q. Was the Trust 'fined' by Scottish Natural Heritage for failure to achieve targets at Mar Lodge Estate?

A. The estate receives about £170,000 per year from Scottish Natural Heritage – around £51,000 of this is for deer management. There has been no 'fine' as such; what actually happened late in 2011 was that SNH withheld some of this grant because we did not achieve the performance indicators we agreed to over the preceding five years regarding forest regeneration.

We actually saw in advance that this would be the case and voluntarily did not draw down some of the funding allocated to Mar Lodge Estate – an action much appreciated by SNH.

The reason why we did not meet those agreed targets is quite simple: we did not implement our deer management policy early enough and progress with forest regeneration was delayed as a result.

As recognised by SNH, we have in the last three years made excellent headway with the regeneration of the Caledonian Forest within Mar Lodge Estate and there are vibrant and tangible results for anyone to see. We have just completed an ecological survey of the estate and this shows the density of woodland almost doubling and we can show that this happened in direct correlation to the deer population being brought down to a sustainable level of around 1,700.

SNH indicated to us that, based on our renewed progress, they would not expect this situation to be repeated in future.

Q. Is there any deer fencing currently in use on Mar Lodge Estate?

A. Contrary to reports we do use 'strategic' fencing across deer migration routes to discourage them from entering the regeneration area. However, we do not use fencing to surround and isolate the regeneration area as this prevents the natural regeneration and spread of the flora associated with the forest and can directly harm other forms of wildlife. We do want some degree of grazing by deer in the zone as this is actually beneficial to regeneration and the eco-system through dunging. The problem has been that the population of deer on the estate has been so oversized that, without culling, it had been (and would continue) completely denuding any new forest growth.

Q. What is the Section 7 Deer Control Agreement?

A. The Trust has entered a Section 7 Agreement with SNH under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996.
A Section 7 is a voluntary formal agreement under which organisations agree to specific deer management measures. Both parties involved believe that an agreement of this kind will provide a useful framework for finding dynamic solutions to the complex issue of deer management in this unique estate.

Q. Is it true that the Trust sanctioned the use of helicopter 'gunships' and automatic weapons to kill deer?

A. This is totally untrue. Helicopters have occasionally been used to move stalkers and retrieve deer carcasses from areas that are otherwise inaccessible to ground vehicles – nothing else. Professional stalkers use rifles, not automatic weapons – any other suggestion is fantasy.

Q. What is the Trust planning to do with Derry Lodge?

A. Options for the future use of Derry Lodge will be explored and proposals developed in due course.

MARKETING

Q. What is the Trust's marketing strategy?

A. Our current visitor marketing strategy is based on a programme of research and market segmentation carried out independently for the Trust, which identified three main audiences:

1. Tourists – i.e. people spending at least one night away from home – who are looking to experience culture, heritage and the unique identity of their destination

2. Families with children of primary-school age, looking for things to do as a family group with subtle educational benefit; based in Scotland and looking to go out on day trips; travel distance is important so likely to be within 30–45 minute drive time. We need to give this audience reasons to visit and reassure them that the children will enjoy the day out – which means everyone does

3. Couples, usually aged 55+, whose families have usually left home and they can choose things that they want to do based on their own interests. May be retired so can visit during the week; may go out for part of the day for coffee and a look round a garden; more time to read; will travel a bit further than families; based in Scotland so it is still important to give reasons to go or go back to a property.

A plan has been put together to target each of these audiences using a variety of media – from leaflets and advertising in tourism guides to local press and radio. Our website underpins all this activity. This plan has been published internally in our 'marketing prospectus'.

Over the next few months, we will do further work to confirm that these audiences are still the core ones for the Trust and identify any gaps in our promotional work.

Q. How much of the Trust's marketing is done at a local level?

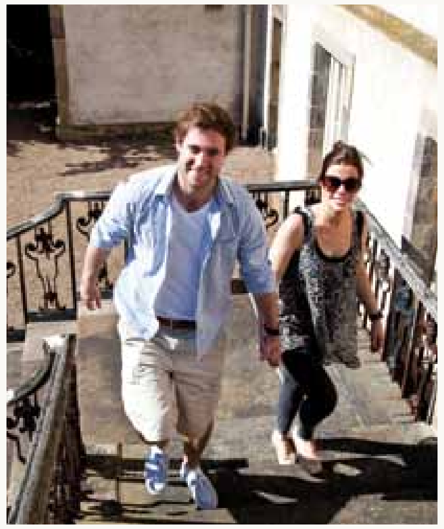
A. The majority of the promotional work undertaken by the Trust is managed and co-ordinated centrally by experienced staff in the marketing and communications departments. The delivery, though, is very much at a local level and we use a mixture of publications, including many local newspapers and local tourism guides, to attract visitors to our properties and events. The overall visitor marketing plan is based on a programme of research and segmentation, managed externally, discussed in detail with individual property managers and published internally in our 'marketing prospectus'.

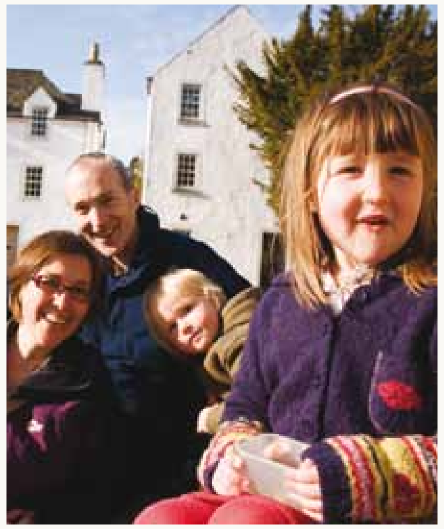
Q. How much marketing is done in partnership with others, particularly Historic Scotland?

A. A lot – we work very closely with many tourism organisations such as VisitScotland and VisitBritain, as well as with accommodation providers, transport providers and other attraction operators. We work with Historic Scotland and the Historic Houses Association in Scotland through the Historic Properties Group, which the Trust currently chairs. The HPG has initiated a number of successful collaborative marketing projects, including joint ticketing at national level and combined promotional activity for the travel trade. The Historic Properties Group's work was highlighted positively by the Reid review last year. We also work with commercial partners, such as Cadbury, and media partners, such as the *Herald* with their gardens guide.

Q. Will the marketing effort change as a result of the new Trust five-year strategy?

A. Yes. As with all other Trust strategies, we will review what we are doing in the light of the new strategic objectives and adopt innovation and change as required. Our approach will still be based on targeting the best audiences for the Trust and by trying to see the organisation, and the experiences it offers, from their perspective – as Burns said:
". . . to see ourselves as others see us."





MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP

Q. How many members of the Trust are there?

A. The Trust had 312,000 members as at February 2012.

Q. What advantages does Membership of the Trust have?

A. Trust Members do not have to pay entry or parking fees for our properties and so can enjoy many visits in the course of a year at a very cost-effective rate. Additionally, reciprocal rights mean that our Members enjoy similar free access to National Trust properties in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, membership fees are our largest source of income and provide a tangible way in which every person or family can provide direct support to our conservation mission.

Q. How do I get my new membership car parking sticker this year?

A. All new members of the Trust receive their first sticker in their document pack. All returning members receive their car stickers with the mailing of the spring edition of our magazine *Scotland in Trust*.

Q. How much does membership cost?

A. Annual membership fees in 2012/13 are priced as follows:

Ordinary Member	£49.00
Family	£83.00
Senior	£35.50
Joint Senior	£58.50
25 and Under	£20.00
Single Adult Family	£56.00

Q. How are membership subscription rates decided?

A. Every year our Board decides on pricing levels once there is more clarity of the impact of macro-economic factors, our own performance and the charges made by our competitors. We are then required to put the cost of the Ordinary Membership forward for approval at our Annual General Meeting.

Q. Why has the Trust set these rates?

A. In setting the level of annual subscriptions, the Trust must balance the competitive nature of the pricing structure in the current economic climate, considering carefully the costs of our competitors (National Trust and Historic Scotland) and setting subscriptions accordingly. This must also be balanced with the likely impact a substantial increase may have on our ability to retain our existing members. The proportion of members who may have no problem with a substantial rise are those who have been members the longest and are more interested in supporting the cause of the Trust, rather than enjoying the benefits. There is currently significant evidence that the rate of cancellation of Direct Debits in relation to charitable giving is at a historical high and has seen continual increases month by month in the last twelve months. With 83% of our members now paying by this means, a large rise in subscription fees would be a risky strategy to help the Trust's financial situation. The last rise of significance was an 8% weighted average increase in 2007/2008 which contributed to a rise of nearly 4,000 extra 'lost' members the following year.

Q. How are you working to improve communication with members?

A. We have a number of successful communications channels for our members: our *Scotland in Trust* magazine, our website and our e-zines. We are always looking for cost-effective and efficient ways of improving communication with members.

As part of the new five-year strategy we will be addressing the various ways we need to enhance communications in pursuit of our strategic priorities. This includes a new communications strategy to support advocacy of heritage, increasing the breadth of our membership base and improving opportunities for members to communicate at regional level. This will be linked to a refreshed marketing strategy for the Trust and a new strategy for digital communications.

Q. Will you use e-mail more often to communicate with members?

A. Email is the most convenient and cheapest form of communication. We are working hard to increase the email information that we hold for members; however, this takes time. We currently have the email addresses of around 50,000 members.

MEMBERS' CENTRES AND FRIENDS GROUPS

Q. What happens to funds raised for properties by Members' Centres?

A. Funds raised by Members' Centres are treated as donations and benefit the property identified by the centre.

Q. What is the future strategy of Members' Centres and Friends Groups?

A. Following a review of fund-raising activities, a Members' Centres and Friends Group Co-ordinator has been recruited to work within our Membership Department. This will allow for the further development of centre and group activity and strategy around Trust properties and the membership base.

Q. How is the Trust supporting recruiting of new members to centres and groups?

A. The Trust is currently in discussion with four Members' Centres (MCs) to approach recently joined Trust members from these MCs' operating areas. These new Trust members will be targeted with specific communications promoting activities at the four MCs. The Trust will monitor the response from these communications and work with the four MCs to decide on suitable recruitment measures for the future. This is part of various recruitment options that we are exploring at the moment.

To reduce costs and enhance communication, we are also looking at ways to ensure more centre and group activity goes online. One of our Group Managers is working with a local IT company to test an online platform for an interest group in particular. We have also asked for feedback on MCs' and Friends Groups' current progress with individual websites in July. The results from this survey will influence our further steps for recruitment / marketing purposes.

NEWHAILES

Q. Are dogs welcome at Newhailes?

A. Yes, very! The vast majority of those using Newhailes to exercise their dogs do so responsibly. However, we have recognised that there is a need to engage more with those many different groups using Newhailes and we are reviewing our existing access plan for the property.

A public consultation was carried out and as a result we have formed a dog walker forum to communicate better with this large group of visitors. We have produced a 'doggy code' leaflet to let people know the way to behave responsibly with a dog at Newhailes.

As part of this initiative we are also looking at upgrading our interpretation on the estate so that we give visitors more information to allow them to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and act responsibly. This is an issue that affects many sites in the area so we are also sharing ideas with those such as councils and other ranger services.

PEATLANDS/WIND FARMS

Q. What is the Trust's policy on Peatlands?

A. The Trust is the third largest landowner in Scotland and holds 3% of Europe's peatlands. We recognise the natural heritage, landscape and archaeological value of peatlands and the importance of peat as a carbon store. The Trust will continue to work to conserve and improve the condition of peatland on its properties and to promote the positive management of peatlands more widely.

Q. What is the Trust's view of the pact between Scottish Renewables, RSPB Scotland, WWF Scotland, FoE Scotland and the SWT to draw up guidelines to allow wind farms on peatlands?

A. We were not consulted on or involved in this agreement. We do have concerns, particularly given the possibility of huge reserves of carbon being released if construction is undertaken on peatland, and in relation to landscape impact. We would like an opportunity to understand the detail of this pact and the scientific and environmental rationale behind it. We are supportive of efforts to replace fossil-fuel generated energy with renewables but are keenly aware of the balance between this need and the need to improve, restore and protect Scotland's landscapes.

PHYTOPHTHORA RAMORUM (SUDDEN OAK DEATH)

Q. Which properties have been affected by sudden oak death?

A. There are confirmed outbreaks at five properties – one with Phytophthora kernoviae (Brodick) and four with P. ramorum (Arduaine, Culzean, Inverewe and Threave).

We are working closely with SGRPID inspectors to monitor and manage the situation. Across Trust gardens, our staff continue to be vigilant to the signs of such diseases, taking early action where necessary.

Without Scottish Government intervention to help with the costs of managing this notifiable disease (in contrast to the UK Government, which has provided upwards of £25m to support landowners with the removal of infected and susceptible plants in England and Wales), the Trust has found it necessary to invest considerable sums in the management of infected sites, notably at Brodick where, regrettably, whole sweeps of the lower woodland garden have been destroyed.

Until the disease is contained or no new infections are identified, long-term planning for the reinstatement of lost garden areas cannot be considered as the list of susceptible plants increases year on year.

We regard the ongoing prevalence and evolution of Phytophthora-linked pathogens to be of the greatest seriousness for Scotland and we call upon all appropriate agencies to come together to consider the implications and actions required.

POLICY

Q. How is the Trust making a contribution to shaping heritage and environment policy in Scotland?

A. We take every opportunity to influence policy makers across Scotland, particularly Government and its agencies. Because the Trust has a broad remit of cultural and natural heritage there are many times that we are able to do this in partnership with other heritage organisations (e.g. Scottish Environment LINK and Built Environment Forum Scotland).

There are areas where the Trust takes a distinct point of view (e.g. crofting), and we worked hard to influence the recent Crofting Bill that went through the Scottish Parliament.

In preparation for national elections earlier this year we have also prepared a Trust Political Manifesto to guide the work we are doing to influence each of the parties to ensure key cultural and natural heritage issues are prominent in the forthcoming party manifestos. We also attended an event at the Scottish Parliament at which we were able to discuss a range of policy issues with MSPs.

PROPERTY PORTFOLIO REVIEW

Q. What is the Property Portfolio Review and why is the Trust carrying it out?

A. The review is essentially an in-depth study of every property we own in order to understand the relative national heritage importance and full nature of conservation upkeep and works required in each case. The need for the study was identified through the independent strategic review of the Trust as carried out in 2009/10 which concluded that the Trust had to prioritise its future investment and use of resources and set out criteria for which properties should truly remain in trust for the nation. To do this, the Trust must fully understand each property and its historical and heritage context.

Q. When will the review be finished?

A. The scale of the task for a relatively small organisation like the Trust cannot be underestimated. We have taken the decision to go beyond what the strategic review asked for in terms of a property review and not just quantify investment needs but heritage significance and potential.

How do you measure heritage significance? We have had to go about essentially developing a new approach from scratch, although we will be using accepted international standards and classifications – something never attempted on this scale before in Scotland and being watched by our partners with interest. The process is underway but it will take at least another year to complete. In nine months we have recruited a new management team, audited our property records, elected a new Board, reformed our system of governance, put in place a new fund-raising strategy and produced a new five-year strategy, as well as running the day-to-day business of the Trust. Not bad by anyone's standards. As one Trustee has said: 'You have to get the filing cabinet in order before you start making plans.'

Q. How will the review actually be carried out?

A. Using international benchmark standards, we will consider each property's aesthetic, historic, scientific and social values, and prepare relative rankings not only across the whole of the portfolio but also in terms of types of properties and where they can be found. Additionally, we will be reviewing our properties in a pan-Scottish context – i.e. what else can be found, and where.

The methodology developed follows the 'balanced scorecard'. There are four key areas:

- CONDITION – What state is the property in?
- CONTEXT – How does the property measure up to our core purpose?
- RESOURCES – What is required in terms of skills, knowledge and finances to ensure proper care and maintenance?
- OPPORTUNITY – Is there scope for added value by releasing the potential of the property?

Once the information is collected and collated, a Management Review will bring all aspects together. In particular, it will concentrate on the consideration and development of the opportunities that are presented, and will work on putting strategies together aimed at realising the potential of the property. The assumption is that the property remains with the Trust, although there might be different management models for delivering the objectives.

PROPERTY CLOSURES

Q. Are there any plans for property closures?

A. There are no current plans.

Q. What has happened to properties previously closed?

- Ben Lawers Mountain Visitor Centre – Planning permission was received in 2011 for a new landscaped car park and outdoor interpretation within the Tarmachan woodland exclosure following the removal of the old centre. Works commenced last October, although they had to be suspended in mid-December because of bad weather and fallen trees blocking the road. The contractors returned to the site in early 2012 and completed the works including building the interpretive shielings, path links to Tarmachan and Lawers, new leaflet dispensers, a deer grid and reinstating the old car park. The new interpretative content is being installed in the sheilings working with an artist and is expected to be finished in June. A further project has been approved to upgrade the interpretation at Lynedoch House in Killin later this year
- Hill of Tarvit mansion house – the house was closed to the public for the season in 2009. A new business plan was approved by the Board in 2010 which enabled the property to reopen, and which saw the Trust focus on promoting the Hill of Tarvit mansion house as a prime venue for hospitality and functions. To that end, we have signed an agreement with Heritage Portfolio to cater all corporate events, weddings and private functions. The gardens, grounds and Kingarrock Golf Course remain open to the public daily
- Hutcheson's Hall – a complete exterior refurbishment has been completed to improve the exterior appearance of the facility, in conjunction with the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust. The long-term aim remains to attract a high-end tenant for this landmark in the heart of the rejuvenated Merchant City area
- Leith Hall mansion house – Generous funding has been provided via the Mutch Bequest and it is planned to re-open the property during 2013. A derelict cottage in the grounds will also be renovated to generate valuable income towards the property's sustainable future. A new gift shop and a catering kitchen for functions will enhance visitor experience whilst not detracting from the lovely interiors and the noted military museum on the top floor.

REID (STRATEGIC) REVIEW

Q. Why was there a Strategic Review of the Trust in 2009/10?

A. In 2008/2009, prompted by the country's economic crisis, the Trust's underlying financial issues came to a head: serious doubts about financial sustainability were articulated given that the General Income Fund (GIF) – the Trust's working reserves necessary to overcome unexpected income shortfalls and unanticipated expenditure – had descended to dangerously low levels.

In essence, recognised practice is that the GIF should be fixed at the level of six months' operational activity. In 2009, this meant the GIF should have stood at £17m – in reality it was only £4.1m. Over the years the Trust had been living beyond its means and had been using reserves to carry on mainstream activity. The Trust was by no means bankrupt or on the immediate precipice of a financial crisis but, unless urgent remedial action was taken to reduce costs, the situation would become very serious.

The matter was further complicated by the fact that some elements of the Trust's income – notably bequests and grants – were often tied to specific sites or uses, further limiting the flexibility the Trust has to reconfigure its finances.

A range of measures to pare back costs was proposed in 2009 including staff redundancies and the closure of ten properties. These proposals generated controversy and expressions of concern.

In response to concerns raised by Trust members and other stakeholders, the Trust's former Council agreed to support an Independent Review.

At its meeting on 30 October 2009, the Council mandated the Rt Hon George Reid, the former MP, MSP and Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, to:

- Conduct a strategic review of Trust resources and governance in order to assess the organisation's capability to address current and future challenges
- Carry out the review independently and transparently, taking into account the views of all stakeholders
- Prepare a report making recommendations and providing an outline plan and timetable for implementation.

The final report of the Review was submitted to the Trust's Council at its meeting in Glasgow on Friday 6 August 2010; the Council endorsed the report.

The review findings were subsequently endorsed by Members at the Trust's Annual General Meeting, held at the SECC, Glasgow on Saturday 25 September 2010.

Q. What were the findings of the Strategic Review?

A. The review took nine months to complete and involved obtaining the views of almost 12,000 members. The final report set out 23 recommendations and 22 proposals necessary to secure the Trust's future. Chief among these were that:

- The number of NTS Trustees to be reduced from 87 to 15 – to give the organisation strategic direction
- A new Board to be elected by April 2011 – to implement the reform agenda
- A new Mission Statement to be agreed with members – to emphasise the Trust's core conservation purpose
- An audit and a full property portfolio review of the NTS estate – to determine the cost of maintenance of its estate and its future management
- A five-year strategic plan – to ensure that the Trust worked in future to specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound objectives.

Q. Has the Trust implemented all of the recommendations made in the Strategic Review?

A. Progress on the 23 recommendations and 22 proposals made by the review has been substantial and real:

- In particular, we have streamlined our governance arrangements and now have a Board of Trustees, most of whom were directly elected by our members, who have the remit, freedom, flexibility and nimbleness to make decisions, sometimes tough ones, in the best interests of the Trust and the heritage it cares for
- We have put in place what is virtually an entirely new management team, who bring a range of skills and experience to the table and who have gelled together exceptionally well
- We have audited our properties and starting pulling recorded information – some of it on cards and lists older than the Trust itself – on to modern IT systems
- We have engaged with a range of stakeholders and experts in designing a methodology for carrying out a full heritage review of our portfolio of properties, assessing their significance and investment needs – something never attempted on this scale before and such a major exercise that we cannot complete in a short period
- We have put in place a new fund-raising strategy and this provides us with the means to fulfil our objectives of launching a range of appeals and fund-raising initiatives and engaging with the Scottish diaspora – for example, a new Canadian National Trust for Scotland has just been launched
- We have taken the time to think through the new five-year strategy in detail – taking on board input and options presented by a range of stakeholders, including members, volunteers and staff
- We have addressed one of the central issues identified by the strategic review – that of properly recognising and rewarding our staff – by agreeing and instituting a new pay deal and terms and conditions.

REINTRODUCTION OF NATIVE SCOTTISH SPECIES

Q. What is the Trust doing to protect the red squirrel?

A. The Trust has been working to protect red squirrels for many years and has carried out detailed survey work to identify which properties have populations and where they may be under threat from grey squirrels. Where red squirrels are present we try to modify our woodland design to favour red squirrels rather than greys.

On some properties, where there are regional efforts to control grey squirrels, we support the efforts of our neighbours and undertake control of grey squirrels on our own property. In this we are guided by the work of the Forestry Commission and SNH in identifying priority areas.

The island of Arran is a special case as it is free of grey squirrels and its isolation means that it stands a good chance of staying that way.

Q. Does the Trust support the reintroduction of beavers?

A. Yes. They are a keystone species that have evolved to live in and with the natural ecosystems that are found in Scotland. Their presence helps to maintain both wetland and woodland ecosystems and they serve an important function in the management of water catchments through natural flood alleviation. The UK has a commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity to try to restore species that have been made extinct in recent years. Beavers are an economically important factor in boosting tourism and can help to increase our enjoyment and understanding of the countryside.

Q. What about other species like wolves or lynx?

A. The Trust does not have a position on these. However, the introduction of predators like these could only occur if there are well-researched and carefully constructed plans in place.

REGIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE TRUST

Q. Is the Trust contemplating a return to a regional structure for its services?

A. We have agreed that local member engagement is best facilitated through Regional Panels. We are currently reviewing the way our services are organised and expect to be coming forward with proposals later in 2012. Of course, the structure must help us deliver the objectives of our five-year strategy and ensure that properties received the proper level of support from specialist conservation and other departments.

There are advantages and disadvantages of centralised support services, just as there are advantages and disadvantages to a wholly devolved system. What we need to do is achieve the correct balance that enables organisational efficiency and yet delivers responsiveness at the local level.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Q. What is the Trust's policy on renewable energy developments, such as wind farms?

A. Our Renewable Energy Developments Policy, as the name implies, is mainly directed at helping the Trust respond to development proposals by others. The Trust policy stresses the importance of energy efficiency measures and the reduction of energy demand as a first step. It goes on to state that while renewables are 'preferable' to fossil fuel technologies they should be:

- suitably located and well designed
- assessed against a range of factors including significance of the property / area, visual impact, landscape, wild land, historic environment, biodiversity, overall environmental costings, reversibility, community involvement, etc.

In terms of assessment, it has been practice to take into consideration national and local plans, planning policy and supplementary guidance as well as appropriate Strategic Environmental Assessments / Environmental Impact Assessments where available.

RENTS

Q. Are rents a significant source of income for the Trust?

A. Yes they are. Excluding staff accommodation, the Trust has 180 residential, 25 commercial properties and agricultural lets and crofting properties from which it derives an income from rental or leases.

This is an important source of income to support the operation of the Trust and in some cases to help preserve the conservation status of the buildings themselves, by continuing their productive use.

In situations such as Dunkeld or Culross, the rental properties are a community asset as well as a revenue stream for the Trust. In other examples, such as Cupar Golf Club within Hill of Tarvit Estate, the current land use deserves to be scrutinised for its optimum value to the Trust and the community. In all cases commercial judgement must be balanced with wider social responsibility.

RETAIL

Q. How are the Trust's retail outlets performing?

A. The net contribution for retail in 2010/11 was over £300k, which was a good performance when considered against the trading difficulties faced by high street retailers. Sales performance so far this year is also encouraging; we are trading just ahead of last year.

SALE OF PROPERTIES

Q. Is the Trust selling off properties?

A. A holistic view of all our properties and their associated land holdings is required to distinguish between conservation assets and property with no heritage value which might represent an alternative revenue generation opportunity or capital receipt – for reinvestment in the core conservation purpose.

All property assets are being audited and assessed over time. We remain committed to the principle of the inalienability of properties. However, ancillary structures with no heritage value but located within a wider inalienable estate holding will require particularly careful assessment.

Where possible, income generated through the encouragement of an alternative commercial use should be considered in the context of the associated property conservation objective – i.e. as a balance of Need and Opportunity. For example, the sale of a piece of peripheral land outwith the objective area for restoring a designed landscape might be considered appropriate as a means of paying for that restoration as a consequence. This is effective and sustainable conservation estate management practice.

Q. What's the process for putting properties up for sale?

A. A non-visited properties steering group identifies properties which may be suitable for sale. This group includes representatives from conservation and policy. In some cases, ratification for such decisions is required by the Board, as was the case with Suntrap Garden, which has no heritage significance, and amenity land in Duddingston Village.

SECURITY AT PROPERTIES

Q. Has the Trust reviewed its security policies in the light of thefts – both of valuable antiques and lead from roofs?

A. We have asked all property managers to remain vigilant. There is concern that theft is a growing risk in the heritage industry during hard economic times, with questions arising about how collections are presented to the public – e.g. guided tours and small groups only – with implications for both operating costs and visitor numbers. We have instituted sensible (and very common in most heritage and museum sites) precautions where the layout of properties and their displays demand – such as asking visitors to place large coats and bags in a cloakroom before embarking on a tour.

SIGNATURE PROJECTS

Q. What are signature projects and why do they matter?

A. Signature projects were indentified in our new five-year strategy *Securing the Future of Our Past* as an important means of carrying out focused, intensive and radical re-evaluation of the potential for improvement across all aspects of conservation and visitor experience. They create proving grounds for a thorough review of everything we do at property level – from visitor interpretation to catering, from conservation to energy use and income generation. The lessons learned will be applied right across our portfolio.

Q. What Trust properties are going to become signature projects?

A. In March 2012, we confirmed that the first signature project will be at Brodick Castle and Country Park on the Island of Arran. It will be followed by Inverewe Garden in Ross-shire. More projects will be announced in due course.

Q. Why were these properties selected?

A. We have looked across our portfolio of properties to determine which could form the basis of work that could be applied across other sites. We have announced the first two project sites but these are only the initial projects and more will follow. They will represent a significant investment of time and resources for the Trust.

Brodick on the Isle of Arran can be seen as a microcosm of both Scotland and all Trust properties. It is an historic building full of treasured artefacts; it is adjacent to a country park and iconic landscapes which include Goatfell. If we can find sustainable and appropriate ways forward here, we can do it elsewhere and the lessons we learn can be shared across many properties.

Inverewe Garden is a real treasure and is very important to the Trust, to the local area and to Scotland's heritage. However, we know from a feasibility study funded by generous donors that it can be so much more. This signature project will enable us to work methodically, to identify all the potential that we have at Inverewe and figure out a way to make it the very best it can be. We'll be working creatively, with people from inside the Trust, the community and experts from a wide range of spheres to help us find the best way forward for the garden.

SINGLE FARM PAYMENTS (THE EU COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY)

NB. A briefing paper The National Trust for Scotland: The Single Farm Payment Scheme of the EU Common Agricultural Policy is available from the 'publications' section of our website.

Q. Why does the Trust receive Single Farm Payments?

A. Because we are entitled to them as one of Scotland's biggest landowners with as many as 30,000 out of 70,000 hectares either cultivable or under active cultivation.

Following EU adoption of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 2003, the UK as a Member State adopted the new Single Farm Payment Scheme (SFP) from 2005. This phased introduction, although co-ordinated by DEFRA, was independently implemented by the devolved administrations, including the Scottish Government.

The purpose of SFP was to remove the link between subsidies and production of specific crops – so called 'decoupling'. Unlike previous systems (SFP replaced 11 subsidy schemes) farmers were no longer paid according to the amount of specific crops produced but against 'entitlements' to be released against 'eligible' hectares of land. To participate in the scheme the farmers must maintain eligible land in Good Environmental and Agricultural Condition (GEAC).

A mechanism to facilitate the decoupling process was established in the form of a market enabling farmers to buy, sell and lease eligible land or entitlements in order to use the resulting grants and income to fund diversification as their business models dictated.

Entitlement values were based on the subsidies which were claimed during the 'reference period' (2000–2002) and amalgamated into a single payment calculated on an entitlement per hectare. The entitlement to receive the payment is attached to the landowner/farmer and not to the land itself.

Entitlements can be put up for sale for the following reasons:

- Farmers wish to capitalise on their SFP ownership by selling it and using the money to diversify (e.g. through new buildings or equipment)
- Farmers have sold their land and consequently still own entitlements on which they cannot claim under SFP because they do not have sufficient acreage
- Leasing agreements for land that they had in place over the 2000–2002 period have subsequently lapsed, again meaning they have insufficient acreage.

As a result, the market for purchase of SFP entitlements by landowners who have suitable 'naked acres' of land has grown substantially.

As a conservation charity, the Trust is committed to sustainable land-use based on bio-diversity, which is also one of the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy and consequently an aim of the SFP scheme.

This follows because the ecologies of some of our 'visited' landscapes are dependent on 'traditional' farming land-use methods and are therefore kept in cultivation by the Trust either directly or by contractors and tenants.

Additionally, the Trust has been gifted and has purchased land over the last eighty years for the purposes of generating steady income streams, intended for re-investment in our charitable aims as pursued for the good of the nation's heritage. Much of this 'non-visited' land held by the Trust encompasses working farms, forestry and designated cultivable ground. The Trust's farms have historically benefitted from grant payments from the various schemes which pre-dated SFP. These include Canna, Torridon and Glencoe as the main beneficiaries.

At the time of the SFP scheme's introduction, on the basis of subsidies claimed during the reference period, the Trust was granted entitlements on 2,352 hectares of its land. This was worth Euros 31.95 per hectare and an annual income of Euros 75,000.

The Trust was required at this juncture to register all of the land it owned and occupied, including forestry. It became clear as a result of this process that we had many more eligible hectares that we were not claiming against within our estate – this is when it became clear that 30,000 hectares of Trust land was eligible under the scheme.

Accordingly, a project was raised to make the remainder of the eligible land being managed by the Trust work harder by acquiring entitlements on the open market.

We felt that this was appropriate to do as:

- The market existed, and we, like all others involved in farming and land management, had to work within the system as it was
- There was significant low value entitlement on the market as farmers sought to realise capital and we had an excess of eligible land
- We had actively farmed on specific properties for many years
- The payments would be re-invested in our conservation land management objectives, including preservation of historic landscapes and agricultural practices, environmental sustainability and education and access provided by our Countryside Rangers services – all of which are to the ultimate benefit of the heritage of the people of Scotland.

Q. Has the Trust ever traded entitlements for 'naked acres'?

A. Yes, for a period between 2007–2011 only.

Our involvement with 'naked acres' came about by the desire to ensure that we furthered our conservation objectives by deriving income from our estate which we could then re-invest in its upkeep, as well as other land management and bio-diversity projects. This was a logical response to the way the SFP system had evolved.

It was recognised that some of the Trust's balance of SFP eligible land could be let to farmers who had entitlements but no land in order to generate income for conservation investment. As previously indicated, this arrangement was perfectly feasible in that a farm business may have had eligible leases on land during the test period which had subsequently ended, or had found it more profitable to grow non-eligible crops in the form of diversification and wanted to realise their business assets by these means.

Between 2007 and October 2011, the Trust raised around £120,000 through lets equating to approximately £25,000 per annum. This income effectively offset our investment in our traditional crofting management scheme and other mechanisms for delivering conservation management objectives.

The properties in question were Mar Lodge Estate (2007–2009), Torridon (2009–2011), West Affric (2010–2011) and Glencoe (2010–2011). As of October 2011, the Trust has no SFP-eligible land leased to third parties.

To put this in context, the Trust's annual expenditure in looking after Scottish heritage exceeds £36 million. The income generated through letting of eligible land represents less than 0.1% of what we spend on conservation each year.

Q. What is the Trust's view of the Single Farm Payments Scheme?

A. The National Trust for Scotland, along with other conservation organisations, has consistently advocated for the development of an agri-environmental support system that delivers public benefits in return for public investment. These public benefits include environmental protection, social development and economic security.

During the current development period for the future Scottish Rural Development Programme (2014–2020), the Trust, along with other conservation organisations, has continued to argue for:

- Ideally, the phasing out of direct income support under Pillar 1 of the Common Agricultural Policy, as the rationale for simple income support has now expired
- Payments (should these continue to be made) to be on a flat-rate area basis, giving a system that is simpler, more transparent and commands public support
- Support to be linked to the provision of public goods, and which addresses issues across the rural environment
- Progressive redistribution of resources to the more economically disadvantaged but environmentally and culturally important farming and crofting systems in the north and west of Scotland.

SOLAR PANELS/ WIND TURBINES

Q. Does the Trust have any plans to install renewable energy at heritage properties?

A. Feasibility studies for a range of technologies including solar, wind and biomass have been undertaken at some key properties. A Renewable Energy Working Group has been established for more proposals to be brought forward for individual properties as has been spectacularly achieved at Fair Isle (self-sufficiency and Feed in Tariff income from community Wind Turbine) for example. Work is underway to ensure that decisions are made with evidence of both robust cost-return analyses and appropriate consideration of environmental impacts.

Technologies such as ground and air source heat pumps, micro-hydro and strategically located photovoltaic panels are being given serious consideration. Nothing is ruled out although visual impact of wind turbines and the environmental sustainability of a biomass technology bring their own controversies. Improved energy efficiency is one of the themes for seed-corn and signature projects we wish to see taken forward as part of the new strategy.

ST KILDA

Q. Why is St Kilda so important to Scotland?

A. St Kilda, situated on the western approaches to the British Isles from the North Atlantic, is one of only 24 places in the world awarded United Nations World Heritage Status for both natural and cultural heritage – a heritage that is beautiful and beguiling. In this one place, 66 km out to sea from the nearest landfall, the long-playing stories of geology, wildlife and human culture have integrated in the most dramatic ways possible.

St Kilda's islands of Hirta, Dun, Soay and Boreray possess the highest sea cliffs and stacs in Britain.

These majestic faces and towers of rock loom over boiling seas and are home to the world's largest colony of gannets. More than one in every hundred gannets on the entire planet is to be found nesting here and they are just one of 17 species of seabird that come to St Kilda every spring and summer to breed.

Under the sea, there is a remarkable marine landscape. Oceanic currents swirl unusually clear warm and cold waters around enormous communities of animals and plants, including jewel anemones that stud the rugged rocks set among forests of kelp and beautiful jellyfish of many different types, including lion's mane, comb jelly, string and many others, which drift along serenely, while long-clawed squat lobsters thrive 20 metres below. The waters are also home to basking sharks, minke and killer whales, which patrol the plankton-rich inshore zones every summer.

St Kilda is a place of magical contrasts and the absolute contrast with these largest of sea mammals can be found above the waves in the islands' hilly topography – the unique St Kilda mouse, surviving among lichen, ferns, flowers and grasses existing at the extreme edges of their tolerance.

The largest animal above the waves, the feral Soay sheep, is also unique to St Kilda. They are direct descendants of the original and most primitive wild species, first domesticated 7,000 years ago, their bloodline rendered intact by the extreme isolation of the land they graze on.

We have evidence that people struggled to St Kilda in their precarious boats as long ago as the Neolithic period. Eventually they stayed, although throughout subsequent history it is unlikely that the population ever rose above 200 souls.

Christianity took root in the islands before the 10th century, and an early cross-inscribed stone was found as recently as 2011. Archaeology has uncovered monastic cells, cairns and circular stone formations – all testament to the remarkable persistence and fortitude of the people who struggled to survive on the islands.

The most striking man-made features are the cleits – conical multi-purpose drystone structures in which crops, seabirds, eggs and peat would be stored and dried for consumption. Hirta alone has more than 1,400 cleits.

However, as time passed, the struggle for survival eventually became too much for the St Kildans, despite over two millennia of valiant efforts. The last 36 islanders eventually asked to be taken to a new life on the mainland and on 29 August 1930, the *Harebell* set sail and the St Kildans looked upon their home for the last time.

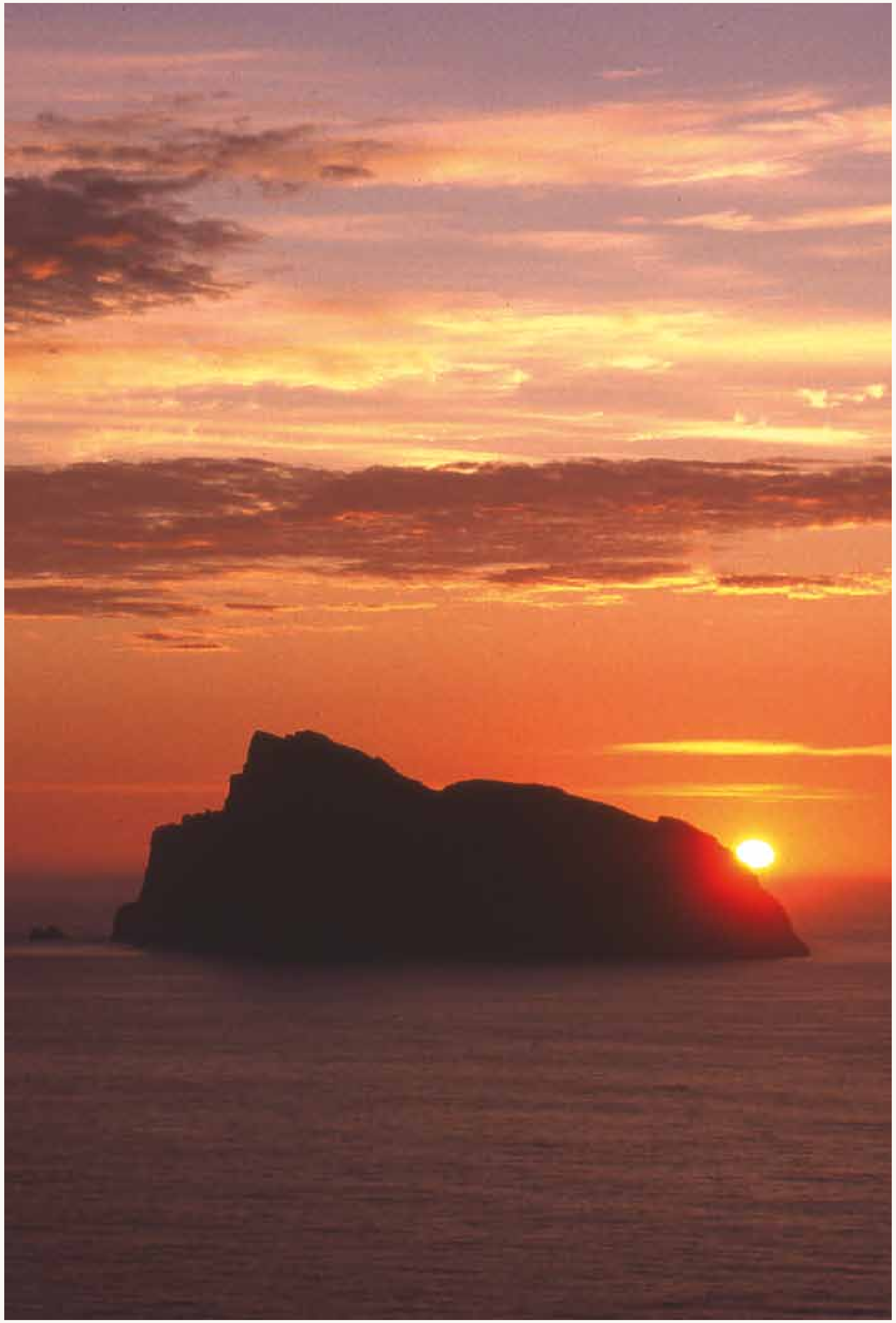
Behind them they left a necklace of 19th-century dwellings in Village Bay, now a haunting memorial to a lost community.

Q. What is the Trust's view of the proposed St Kilda visitor centre being set up by Western Isles Council?

A. We remain co-operative with the Council and understand the reasons why they wish to pursue the project.

Q. Why does the Trust want to see a marine reserve created around St Kilda?

A. We are greatly concerned by the damage that (mainly foreign) trawlers equipped with drift nets can do to the sea-floor ecosystem. We also want to ensure that St Kilda's unique marine environment is protected from any future potential energy projects, such as undersea turbines or oil exploration.



STRATEGY – SECURING THE FUTURE OF OUR PAST

Q. What does the Trust's new five-year strategy say?

A. The strategy, entitled Securing the Future of our Past, was published in September 2011 and covers the period until March 2016. It provides a clear focus on strategic priorities and is a direct response to the recommendations arising from a root and branch independent review of the charity led by former Scottish Parliament presiding officer the Rt Hon. George Reid in 2009/10.

As the Chairman of the Trust, Sir Kenneth Calman remarked, "Reforms, careful evaluation and fresh thinking have enabled us to be in a position to publish this new strategy and set in train the process of awakening 'the sleeping warrior' that is the Trust. We are ready and prepared for a new era of innovation, engagement and advocacy for the natural, built and cultural heritage that makes Scotland so special and unique.

"As we looked at each of the sites we care for in depth, we came to understand just how much opportunity there is in each. As a Board we saw no need to consider the disposal of major heritage properties – instead we can unlock their potential in order to secure their ongoing conservation for future generations."

The strategy sets out five objectives covering:

- The portfolio and its conservation
- The promotion of Scotland's heritage
- Financial sustainability
- Visitor enjoyment, and
- Investment in people.

In achieving the objectives by 2016, a number of priorities are indentified including:

- Making the changes and efficiencies necessary to achieve financial stability, so that the Trust has a spring-board to develop ambitious new projects and a sustained, international fund-raising campaign
- From opportunities identified through a painstaking review of properties, deploying multi-disciplinary teams to pilot and apply the highest possible standards of conservation, community engagement, learning, interpretation, presentation and visitor experience, with the lessons learned to be shared around the Trust
- Freeing up and encouraging innovation within Trust staff and volunteers, and
- Increasing membership numbers and convincing a wider range of people to identify with the Trust and the cause of conserving, cherishing and protecting Scotland's heritage.

Q. Will the new five-year strategy really resolve the Trust's issues?

A. It has been clear for some time that there are certain things the Trust must do if it is to survive, not least through the recommendations of the 2009/2010 independent review. We must focus on our core purpose and not be distracted by anything that is superfluous or 'nice' to do.

We have to address our underlying financial sustainability and, at a time when potential visitors and members have so many options to choose from, fight to show why the properties we conserve are so important – and to do this we have to offer the highest quality of conservation linked to the best possible visitor experience. These issues are all addressed in the strategy.

What is radically different from the past is that we are encouraging innovation, changing the culture of the Trust and will be persistent and dogged in delivering the objectives and priorities described – we are in this for the long haul.

Q. Does the Core Purpose as described in the strategy set a balance between conservation and commercial activity?

A. The Core Purpose affirms that conservation is at the heart of all we do. But we still need to have commercial functions and a commercial outlook in order to generate the income that fuels our conservation efforts. Our Core Purpose does not present any contradiction in this.

Q. The strategy sets out a lot of ambitious objectives – where do we find more information about when and how they will be achieved?

A. The strategy document merely sets out the main objectives we want to achieve over five years. The detail of how we do that belongs in the annual action plans we will produce, enact and monitor. Our staff and other stakeholders have been involved in specifying what these actions will be and the first detailed annual delivery plan, *Sowing the Seeds*, was published in March 2012.

Q. What has the Trust learned from the past?

A. The strategy combines innovation with good management practice and common sense.

We know that in the past, even when innovation was successful, there was a failure to see it through or share the lessons learned. The approach this time is intended to apply skills and learning right across the Trust. 'Signature projects', for example, will allow us to radically review and change the way we manage, conserve, present and interpret properties so that they reach their full potential; there will be real benefits from this process that will be applied elsewhere.

An important means of delivering the strategy in this initial phase of consolidation and change will be to take a look at the management and support systems that underpin the Trust – these will include management and skills needs, IT and support systems, project management processes and the organisational structure of the Trust itself.

We cannot change everything at once but we will enact purposeful change over the next five years that will bring about the transformation of the Trust.

Q. How was the strategy developed? Did Trust Members have a say?

A. The strategy was directly informed by the strategic review, which in turn tested the opinion of at least 12,000 members. We also offered all members and visitors the opportunity to take part in a survey over the summer and over 4,000 members responded. We have built the aspirations expressed into the strategy. Detailed actions were developed via 'workstreams' that included staff, volunteers and external stakeholders.

As our Trustees are elected by the membership, their remit is to represent the wider membership in developing and approving the strategy – consequently, once Trustees have approved the strategy, it need not be put to a vote at our AGM, which in any case only attracts a very small proportion of members.

Q. The strategy talks about balancing the portfolio and entering into new management arrangements at properties – does this mean the Trust will sell properties?

A. Our aim is to retain all of the 129 heritage properties we currently care for.

However, it is clear that to be able to do this, and invest in those properties, we will absolutely have to focus on our core purpose. That is why we have already decided to dispose of Suntrap Garden and a parcel of land in Duddingston – in both cases the lack of heritage value was clear-cut.

The purpose of the heritage property review is to consider relative importance in national terms and support the development of detailed conservation and business plans.

The review may very well signal changes for the way we run some of our properties. This does not mean that jobs will be lost – but it could mean that some properties could receive external investment or be subject to different models of management, if that is best for their long-term conservation.

We also have to consider whether the current portfolio is the right one in order to discharge our core purpose – this need not only mean managing some properties differently or not at all, but, in time, and under the right conditions, securing new ones.

Q. What is a 'signature project'?

A. Signature Projects are effectively the means by which we will explore and enact best practice and find approaches covering virtually all disciplines – ranging from conservation to visitor experience – that we can apply elsewhere across the Trust. We announced our first and second projects – Brodick Castle and Country Park and Inverewe Garden respectively – in March 2012 and others will follow as we progress. The learning and best practice from the different projects will ultimately join up in order to effect a transformation of the culture and management of the Trust. The first project will be announced soon but is likely to be based around a specific property that will be subject to the attentions of multi-disciplinary teams.

Q. How are signature projects chosen? What impact will this approach have on other properties and the Trust's staff?

A. Firstly, signature projects will cover a range of properties and situations. We are not simply going to choose properties with the highest visitor numbers in order to find ways to extract more income quickly.

Signature projects will instead focus on properties – and services or functions too – where full potential is not being met and there is a challenge. If we can find ways to overcome some of our most difficult challenges, then the lessons learned and the methods proven will be all the more valuable for the rest of the Trust and the Trust's well-being.

Signature projects will be designed and delivered by multi-disciplinary teams working across the Trust.

This may mean staff from other properties pitching in – this is not a matter of taking resources from some properties to benefit others, but to find ways to overcome challenges and improve all aspects of properties and to use the experience gained regarding what works and what does not. In time, more properties will become signature projects in their own right.

Q. How can 'signature projects' be selected when the Trust's review of properties is not completed?

A. Because we don't need to complete a detailed review to see those properties where there are significant opportunities, challenges and where improvements can be made. If we actually go for 'difficult' sites, we think any success achieved can be applied to other sites.

Q. When will the review of properties be complete?

A. The scale of such a task for an organisation as relatively small as the Trust cannot be underestimated. How do you measure heritage significance? We have had to go about essentially developing a new approach from scratch – something never attempted on this scale before and being watched by our partners with interest. The process is underway but it will take at least another year to complete. In the nine months from January 2011 we recruited a new management team, audited our property records, elected a new board, reformed our system of governance, put in place a new fund-raising strategy and produced a new five-year strategy, as well as running the day-to-day business of the Trust. That's not bad by anyone's standards. As one Trustee has said, 'you have to get the filing cabinet in order before you start making plans.'

Q. How does the Trust work with Historic Scotland?

A. The Trust and Historic Scotland work closely on a range of heritage issues from the new Battle of Bannockburn project to various local and national initiatives. We are always finding new ways to work together for the general benefit of the heritage sector. We don't rely on Government money as an organisation but we do receive very generous grants that make a real difference to specific sites and projects.

Q. Why is the Trust getting involved in 'advocating' Scotland's heritage?

A. The Trust wants to highlight the importance of Scotland's heritage and encourage understanding and appreciation of it. These are goals we share with Government and we will work together in achieving them.

Q. The Rt Hon George Reid emphasised that the entire heritage sector in Scotland should be working together seamlessly – how does the Trust's new strategy address that?

A. A central part of the strategy is to seek new ways of managing and promoting heritage in partnership – we will actively pursue this.

Q. Will an organisational restructure take place as part of the implementation of this strategy?

A. In the first instance, we must review and audit our skills base and management requirements – not least the key role of property managers. Further, we have to consider the implications of the strategic priorities we have set out in action plans for their implementation. This will involve consideration of our organisational structure.

Clearly, structure and ways of working must best suit delivery of our objectives. However, volunteers, staff and trade union representatives would be consulted with in relation to any proposals for change and in advance of their finalisation. We will ensure we have an open and consultative approach should we need to undertake changes to organisational structure.

Q. Will 'efficiencies' include redundancies?

A. There are no such plans. In time we will rebalance the skills we need to deliver our strategy – but we will take our staff along with us in this process through management and skills development programmes.

Q. Are the Trust's financial aims attainable in the current world economic climate?

A. There will have to be some investment to make the necessary changes but we will be tightly controlling budgets and living within our means.

We are aware that we have to step up our game in terms of fund-raising and selling memberships but we think the priorities set are realistic, attainable and, ultimately, fundamental to address the long-term sustainability of the Trust.

Q. What happens next?

A. Implementation of the strategy is underway. We are preparing the first annual plan and the property portfolio review is also underway. We will make regular reports on progress.

Q. When will the Trust be buying more properties?

A. The first five years, as defined by our new strategy, will be about consolidation and change. Ultimately we want to be in a position to buy more properties based on the criteria we set ourselves and on what is important to Scotland's heritage.

SUNTRAP GARDEN

Q. Why is the Trust selling Suntrap Garden?

A. The independent review of the Trust as published in 2010 strongly recommended that we had to divest ourselves of non-heritage properties that either drained our resources or did not fit in with our Core Purpose. Regrettably, Suntrap is the clearest possible example of a minor site that no longer has any national heritage significance.

- Suntrap was the home of George Boyd Anderson, who began the garden there in 1957. The site was bequeathed to the Trust to provide a centre for horticultural advice and education, although Boyd Anderson's adjacent private dwelling, Millbuies House, was never gifted to the Trust
- In 1979, the Trust effectively disposed of its interest in the site by leasing its portion of the grounds to Lothian Regional Council so that it could be used by Oatridge Agricultural College as a training facility. Following local authority reorganisation in 1996, the college took full operational responsibility for the site. It decided to close the garden and vacate Suntrap in October 2010
- As a result of the College's decision, due to a clause in the 1979 lease agreement, the National Trust for Scotland accepted the return of the larger portion of the Suntrap site, including Suntrap House and garden, to its formal ownership pending a decision on its future. Since then, the Trust reviewed options for the site, including the possibility of continued horticultural use, and met with the Friends of Suntrap group to discuss these
- Detailed assessment by our garden and landscape specialists has confirmed that the site has no particular heritage significance. We can find no justification to maintain it as a Trust property. The strategic review showed that we had a stark choice – if we continue to subsidise sites that are of limited importance, the Trust will fail and this will put the nation's most exceptional historic properties and landscapes in jeopardy
- Suntrap incurs significant costs to the Trust through rates and other maintenance charges
- Although the Board of Trustees has agreed that the garden should be disposed of, they felt that a final opportunity should be given to the Friends of Suntrap to find a way to purchase the property outright
- Consequently the Friends of Suntrap were offered first refusal on the gardens, including the opportunity to come up with any funded proposals that would give the gardens a long-term, purposeful use –they were first alerted to our intentions in November 2010. Unfortunately no viable or credible proposal for the Friends of Suntrap to take over the site has come forward.
- Suntrap is not an 'inalienable' property. Boyd Anderson made it very clear in his original gift that the management of the property was to be at no cost to the Trust and, if this did not prove to be the case (as is certainly the case now), he imposed no constraint on us selling it on the open market
- The one condition placed on us by George Boyd Anderson in event of Suntrap's sale was that the proceeds should go towards Trust properties in Edinburgh, Midlothian, Morayshire and the Cairngorms. Our Board want to respect his wishes as well his contribution to horticulture, and have decided to dedicate the proceeds we receive to gardens in these areas
- We will honour the spirit of George Boyd Anderson's original gift by ensuring it has an enduring legacy in assisting with the upkeep of those gardens of world-class significance in our care

TAK TENT SURVEY (SUMMER 2011)

Q. What was the outcome of the survey of visitors undertaken over the summer of 2011?

A. The headline results are as follows:

- A total of 4,269 responses were received. The responses came from both the online survey and a paper questionnaire
- Over 85% of respondents were members of the National Trust for Scotland
- The majority (over 81%) of respondents were aged 45+
- Almost all (98%) correctly identified that the Trust is a charity and not a government department
- The Trust is perceived as being: Friendly
  Environmentally friendly
  Traditional
  Welcoming
- Non-members were less likely to associate the Trust with those perceptions
- The Trust is identified as being most closely associated with historic buildings and gardens
- An overwhelming number of respondents (97%) agreed with the Core Purpose: 'The purpose of the National Trust for Scotland is to conserve and promote our heritage.'
- Three key priorities were identified:

  1. Become financially sustainable
  2. Increase membership
  3. More involvement of local communities.

TRUST BRAND AND NAME

Q. Is any consideration being given to changing the Trust's name in response to claims that it is being confused with other organisations?

A. The Board of Trustees gave serious consideration to this issue. They decided against any change for a number of reasons:

- The suggestion that solicitors have been misdirecting bequests to the National Trust (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) rather than the National Trust for Scotland appears anecdotal – we can find no confirmation of examples of this
- We regularly send information to solicitors reminding of our correct name and the legal forms of address they should use in drawing up wills
- We estimated that changing our name would incur more than £4 million of costs in changing signage and documentation, even if staged over time
- We have built up a considerable reserve of brand value and identity for our current name that would be lost overnight
- We feel the best approach is to strengthen our existing brand as part of the campaigns we have outlined in our new five-year strategy.

TWITTER

Q. Why is the Trust using Twitter?

A. The Trust is committed to improving our communication and spreading the word about our vital conservation work. We have recruited almost 5,000 members who are taking an active interest in the organisation, re-tweeting (spreading the word) our news and engaging with us. Broadly we are seeing an exponential rise in the use of social media across all age groups, and we can now recognise online 'communities' who share an interest in heritage matters and in Scotland – by far exceeding the readership of most of our national newspapers.

VISITOR NUMBERS

Q. How are visitor numbers to Trust properties bearing up?

A. In the course of 2010/11, in common with other attractions, our visitor numbers were mixed. Some areas did very well – such as Fife and Arran – and others less so, such as Inverewe and Crarae. There are, of course, lots of reasons why people may choose to visit, or not to visit, one of our properties and often these are factors outwith our control – e.g. cost of fuel or inclement weather. We influence visits through our marketing work and events programme and monitor numbers on a weekly basis, so we react to situations in addition to our proactive and planned work. Visitor numbers do not tell the whole story, of course, as the mix of paying/non-paying visitors is important to achieve targets in admissions income, membership recruitment and spend in catering and retail.

Q. Why do visitor numbers vary so much each year?

A. This is generally down to a variety of reasons, many of which it is not in our gift to control. External factors may be the impact of particularly bad weather, issues around transport to and around Scotland or particularly good weather which can have a positive impact. Internal factors may be a change to opening dates/times, which can obviously either increase or decrease the time that visitors can enjoy a property. Opening times are reviewed every year and based on perceived visitor demand, conservation requirements of each property and the cost of opening compared with the likely income.

VOLUNTEERS

Q. How many volunteers does the Trust have?

A. More than 3,000 in a wide range of roles and locations across Scotland.

Q. How do I become a Volunteer?

A. In short, in the way that best suits your personal interests and circumstances.

Every year, our enthusiastic volunteers donate their time to projects, properties and events across Scotland. Without them we could not function and could not protect and conserve Scotland's heritage.

We are fortunate to have a vibrant volunteering community spanning the nation – from drystane dyking on Fair Isle, to property guiding in the Borders. Volunteering can suit people of all ages who are interested in trying new experiences, meeting new people, learning new skills and seeing new places.

We offer the following routes to volunteering:

- Conservation Volunteers – Local outdoor groups based in Glasgow, Lothian, Grampian, Tayside and Highland who look after activities such as drystane dyking, footpath maintenance and woodland management
- Property Volunteers – The National Trust for Scotland also offers opportunities to become a Property Guide at one of our many properties across Scotland.

This is an excellent way to meet new people from all over the world and see behind the scenes at some fascinating historic buildings and battlefields. The roles vary from property to property; volunteers could be involved in guiding, education programmes, events or recreations, depending on experience and interests.

- Garden Volunteers – The National Trust for Scotland has a team of dedicated gardening volunteers located at some of our beautiful garden properties. Each garden is very different and the tasks which volunteers undertake can be hugely varied. These can include general garden upkeep, specific plant propagation, plant sales and research into the history of the garden and the plants. Volunteers also answer questions from the public and in some properties give tours of the garden.

These can include general garden upkeep, specific plant propagation, plant sales and occasional research into the history of the garden and the plants.

There may also be a call to answer questions from the public from time to time and perhaps a chance to give tours of the garden.

- Thistle Camp Volunteers – Our popular Thistle Camps programme is also a great way to get involved in volunteering and conservation with the National Trust for Scotland.
  Volunteers live, breathe and enjoy some of Scotland's most beautiful scenery and spaces, helping to keep them looking that way for future generations to enjoy. Our working holidays are a fantastic introduction to some of the conservation that goes on all year round at Trust properties and also allow volunteers to meet and work with experts in archaeology, gardening, conservation and nature, to name but a few
- Central Office Volunteers – volunteers within Central Office are part of the team that helps the National Trust for Scotland carry out its aims and objectives to look after Scotland's cultural and natural heritage. Based at Hermiston Quay in Edinburgh, our volunteers can be found helping carrying out a range of roles and administrative tasks that help support the Trust's work.

  This is simply a sample of the range of important work carried out by our volunteers. Visit our website for further information on how to volunteer.

Q. How does the Trust keep volunteers up to date with recent developments?

A. Volunteers receive regular updates via email, the intranet system and newsletters. Trust managers also have a responsibility to ensure volunteers in their teams are up to speed with the latest developments.

We are very grateful to our thousands of volunteers who have demonstrated such sterling support for the organisation.

Q. How does the Trust demonstrate appreciation of its volunteers?

A. We are very grateful to our thousands of volunteers who have demonstrated such sterling support for the organisation.

We truly value our volunteers and we could not function without them – in many ways they are the 'soul' of the Trust, as well as its 'muscle'. The annual Volunteer of the Year award recognises the contribution made by volunteers and in addition, the George Waterston award is presented at our AGM to mark the most outstanding contribution made by a volunteer.

We are committed to working to best practice in relation to volunteer reward and recognition and are seeking 'Investors in Volunteering' accreditation for all of our volunteering activities – we have already achieved accreditation for our Conservation Volunteers and Thistle Camps.

WEMYSS HOUSE, CHARLOTTE SQUARE, EDINBURGH

Q. Does the Trust have a view regarding the redevelopment of its former HQ at Wemyss House?

A. Our disposal of Wemyss House included a Conservation Agreement on the property which will ensure that any alterations to the fabric follow the appropriate processes and standards in place. We have been involved in discussions with the agents for the new owner, and are largely supportive of the approach adopted. However, we have not made comments on the planning/listed building consent applications as this was not thought appropriate. The Trust remains a part to wider discussions about the square due to our remaining ownerships at Numbers 5–7.

Q. What happened to the collections previously held in Wemyss House?

A. In terms of the collections, most items have found new homes. Both the Hutchison and Stirling Collections have been re-housed at the House of Dun in a new gallery space developed in the former library. This will stay in place for a total of five years at the end of which time we will review the success of the new gallery space.

WEATHER

Q. What was the impact on properties of the severe winter weather in 2010/11?

A. We counted the cost of broken gutters, burst pipes and damaged trees and shrubs following last year's record snowfalls and low temperatures. December 2010 was the coldest in 100 years, with plummeting temperatures, heavy snow, gale-force winds and ice.

Properties all over Scotland felt the impact of the Big Freeze. Some of the worst hit properties were:

- Threave Garden and Estate – the network of paths needed repair after melt-water seeped into the cracks, froze and caused surfaces to crumble. The cost of repairs was £15,000
- Mar Lodge Estate in Braemar – ice and snow removed slates from the roof and destroyed guttering around the property. The cost of replacement was estimated at £5,000
- Canna – high winds took their toll as 100-mile-per-hour gusts ripped the roof from a croft building, removed tiles from neighbouring structures and lifted the pier gangway from its tether and threw it into the handrail.

We estimated that we had to spend in excess of £100,000 on extra repairs as a result of the harsh winter. Our insurance covers some of this, but to ensure that we could cover the costs comfortably and start work on immediate repairs, we launched an appeal in January 2011 and were very gratified to have an exceptional response to it from many generous members.

WILDFIRES

Q. How much damage was done by the wildfires that affected Trust properties in the spring of 2011?

A. The wildfires that raged across the hills of Ross-shire over the weekend of 30 April – 2 May 2011 badly affected two of the Trust's key properties: the Torridon and Kintail & Morvich Estates in Ross-shire. At several points the conflagrations threatened Inveralling forestry scheme and Torridon village, as well as Torridon House and nearby woodlands. In Kintail, firefighters had to work hard to protect Invershiel, but, unfortunately, the flames reached one of the Trust's forest regeneration plantations above Kintail Village and the A87.

The regeneration is part of a carefully orchestrated plan to join up existing patches of ancient woodland by re-establishing the Caledonian pine forest and is one of the Trust's key conservation objectives. In some of Scotland's most spectacular landscapes, ancient forest remnants are being augmented by new growth. Footpaths thread through the forest, linking the Moray Firth in the east to Kintail.

The loss of the mature trees was heartbreaking to all those involved in forest regeneration in the area over many years. However, we must be thankful that no-one was hurt. We are still discussing settlement with our insurers and expect to have incurred at least £150,000 worth of losses. The full picture will not be clear until spring 2012 at which point we can see how much natural recovery has taken place. We are considering our options in order to find ways to begin re-establishment of the affected area of forest once again.

Q. What can be done to prevent more wildfires in future?

A. The wildfires resulted from the actions of people unconnected to the Trust. We have, however, undertaken a programme of staff training in this area.